

THE BAPTIZING COMMUNITY

CHRISTIAN INITIATION
AND THE LOCAL
CONGREGATION



A. Theodore Eastman

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CHRISTIAN INTO EDOM AND THE
LIFE OF A COMMUNITY

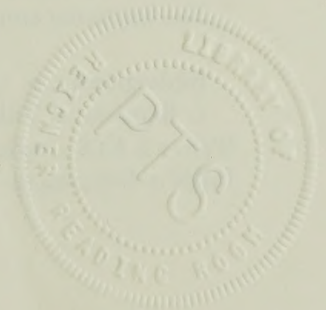
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A. Theodore Eastman

The Baptizing Community

CHRISTIAN INITIATION AND THE
LOCAL CONGREGATION

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For three who are discovering their vocations as members of
the primary order of Christian ministry:

SARAH, ANNE, ANDREW

1982

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Introduction

When I was a child my parents were not active in any religious community. They explained this as a logical and justifiable reaction to their overexposure as children to the very strict piety of their Swedish Lutheran parents. With transparent inconsistency, they sent me to an assortment of Sunday schools but never participated themselves. I dutifully sampled most of the various traditions in our town and was not happy with any of them.

In what was more a gesture of friendship than a conscious attempt at evangelization, a neighborhood chum invited me to attend the local Episcopal church where he and his sister were active. I was in the third grade at the time.

Because my friend sang in the boy choir, I was invited to join it too. No one in authority made any prior attempt to test my singing ability. It wasn't long, however, before the limits of my musical talent became obvious. I was quickly promoted—or so I thought at the time—to the ranks of the acolytes.

During the next several years I served my time, along with everyone else my age, in class after boring class in Sunday church school. I came to see this as the price I had to pay in order to be a part of a warm and accepting community where I had a small but important job to do. Someone, after all, had to light those candles and carry that cross.

In my thirteenth year, someone—probably the rector—suggested that I be confirmed. I vaguely remember a series of Saturday classes but can recall nothing of the material covered. Toward the end of the course, the rector asked all of us to bring

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him evidence of our baptism, if we wished to be confirmed. When I asked my mother to produce my certificate, she told me that I had never been baptized. So baptism was hurriedly arranged for a Saturday prior to the Sunday when the bishop was to come for confirmation. That particular Saturday happened to be Easter Eve, but no point was made, as far as I can recollect, of the historical and liturgical reasons for baptizing on that occasion.

I cannot recall any specific preparations for my baptism, but I vividly remember the service itself and some of my feelings about it. Only a few people were present in the church that afternoon. One or two others were being baptized along with me. Some of their family and friends were present but I think only one of my parents attended. I had no other sponsors. Something about the setting of the ceremony made it seem somewhat surreptitious.

I felt strange about engaging in an action that my peers had experienced years before at what I gathered was the proper time. I knew that something crucial was happening to me, but its importance seemed to be overshadowed by the spectacular event scheduled for the bishop's visitation, for which this baptism was merely the prerequisite.

Despite my momentary confusion and embarrassment, the power of the sacrament was profound. Baptism clearly made a difference in my life. It was not only a moment of spiritual transformation; it was also, I believe, the point at which the seeds of a slowly developing theology of Christian initiation were planted.

As I have reflected on the circumstances and sentiments surrounding that baptism more than forty years ago, I have developed a certain gratitude for my belated sacramental inclusion in the Body of Christ. My recollections of the mixed messages given and received at the time have enabled me to sort out key questions involved in the process of becoming a Christian.

How is one truly incorporated into the church? (I had been included both physically and spiritually long before the issue of my baptism was ever raised.) How is baptism related to mission and evangelism? (I was evangelized with great effectiveness, but no one thought to make an early sacramental connection.) How is the initiatory rite of the church related to rights, responsibilities, and full participation in the total life of the church? (Though un-

baptized, I was fully engaged in parish activities appropriate to my age, with the exception of access to the Holy Communion.) What is the relationship of baptism to confirmation or any other subsequent ratification of baptismal vows? (The circumstances of my own baptism seemed to make it an almost perfunctory preliminary to confirmation. And to have my baptism *completed* by confirmation—as current thinking four decades ago would have regarded it—within a few weeks was atypical and therefore confusing.) What is the appropriate setting or context of Christian initiation? (The sharp contrast between the subdued privacy of my baptism and the festive and public nature of my confirmation gave me a false impression that took years to correct.) What is the proper age for baptism? How do the processes for initiation of children and adults differ? (My late inclusion among the baptized was as eccentric in those days as it is now, but it had its benefits, as far as I am concerned. The classic Christian debate between infant baptism and believer's baptism continues, but perhaps with a new twist.)

During the forty years since my baptism, biblical and liturgical scholars have led the church into a serious and thorough review of the origins, theologies, and practices of Christian initiation. A current bibliography of important books and articles treating the subject, for example, would run to several thousand entries and represent all major western languages.¹ Many worldwide Christian communions have revised their initiatory rites to reflect more faithfully the intention of the church in its earliest days. Most notable among these efforts are the rather radical reforms undertaken in the Roman Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

In the protracted process leading to the revision of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church in the United States, the rites of initiation underwent careful scrutiny and, ultimately, considerable change. While the far-reaching proposals of the liturgical reformers were softened toward the end of the process, the 1979 Prayer Book represents a sharp break with the immediate Anglican past. The very first paragraph in the initial directions concerning the baptismal service makes a clear, direct, and fundamental statement about the centrality of the primary Christian

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sacrament. "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble."² Baptism has not always and everywhere in Anglican tradition been regarded as "full initiation." Should it now be seen as the complete and only entry rite, all kinds of prior assumptions must be questioned. If used properly, taken seriously, and followed to its logical conclusions, the new rite of Holy Baptism could revolutionize the liturgical, political, educational, and missionary life of the Episcopal Church.

Most Episcopal parishes have now had several years of experience in celebrating baptisms according to the 1979 Prayer Book. Many parish clergy—perhaps most—probably adhere to the design of the service and follow the rubrical directions faithfully. Some priests may have taken the further step of enriching now-public baptisms with the kind of imagination that the liturgical movement brought to eucharistic celebrations years ago. Based on fairly broad inquiry, however, my hunch is that few clergy have made significant changes in the way they prepare candidates and sponsors for baptism, even though the operative formularies declare it to represent "full initiation." Nor is it likely that parish life has been reordered to reflect the educational and missionary demands that the reformation of Christian initiation requires.

The title of this book is descriptive of its purpose but also somewhat troublesome. Mainstream Christian doctrine affirms the belief that it is God who baptizes his people, bestowing upon them the forgiveness of sin and raising them to the new life of grace.³ The church is no more than God's agent in this transaction. To call the church "The Baptizing Community," therefore, may seem to undermine this fundamental point. The book argues, however, that the church lags and wanders in its mission in direct proportion to the distance that baptism is allowed to stray from the center of ecclesial life. The Matthean formula for mission clearly places baptism at the heart of the matter, for the church is seen as the community that evangelizes, baptizes, and teaches.⁴ That vision, that sense of priority, needs to be recaptured today. Other titles for this work were considered and discarded, for none of them seemed to describe the church adequately as the body that understands baptism to be the keystone sacrament around which

life and mission are built. As a title, *The Baptizing Community* is troublesome, purposely so. We need to be troubled enough by the issues that the baptismal revolution places before us to take them seriously.

It is the aim of this study to explore what it would mean for a congregation to develop a comprehensive attitude toward Holy Baptism as the keystone sacrament. The first chapter is an historical analysis of how we got where we are today. What earlier practices and insights have meaning for us now? What prior policies have lost their relevance and been discarded? Chapter 2 discusses certain key issues that emerge from the historical survey: infant vs. adult baptism; the relationship of baptism to confirmation-reception-reaffirmation; the relationship of baptism to the eucharist. Chapter 3 sketches fundamental working principles for a congregation that sees itself, in part at least, as a baptizing community. Chapter 4 examines the theology of baptism as it is expressed in the interwoven themes and subthemes of the rite itself. Chapter 5 takes a walk through the service of Holy Baptism and discusses what we do and why we do it, paying particular attention to the power and meaning of baptismal symbols. Chapter 6 suggests a way of organizing parish life so that the congregation continually prepares itself to receive and incorporate new Christians. Within that general, ongoing communal preparation are specific systems for the preparation of infants (through their parents and godparents) and adults (and their sponsors) for baptism. Chapter 7 outlines the experiences of three quite different congregations that take preparation for Christian initiation seriously. An example of diocesan guidelines is also included as a way of encouraging the development of unified (if not uniform) policies that reach beyond the local parish. The study concludes with an annotated selection of printed and audiovisual resources that may be helpful in constructing curricula.

This book could not have been written without the help of many people, only a few of whom can be acknowledged here. The Dean and Faculty of the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest invited me to be a Visiting Fellow in the winter of 1980, during which time the basic reading was done and an initial outline completed. The Wardens and Vestry of St. Alban's Parish

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A. Theodore Eastman

Washington, D.C.

The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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CHAPTER ONE

Historical Perspectives

ALL religions have an event or ceremony to mark the admission of new adherents into the fold. Many have additional rites of cleansing to restore a member who has become ritually impure or has fallen away from accepted belief or practice. A number of ancient religions have used the potent primal element of water for their initiatory or purification rites—or for both.

While Christian initiation shares some common elements with the practices of other religions, the taproot reaches directly into Christianity's immediate antecedent, Judaism. The aim of this chapter is to examine the sources of the initiatory rites of the church, not exhaustively but thoroughly enough to understand the meaning of the most fundamental and enduring elements.

The basic building block of baptism is the Old Testament concept of covenant. In a covenant, God takes the initiative in reaching out to people and bestowing favor upon them, and the people respond to God's beneficent action with a promise of faithful obedience. The bargain that has been struck is then sealed with a ritual. The covenant that Moses negotiated in behalf of Israel, for example, was sealed with the splashing of blood.¹ Earlier, the sign of God's covenant with Abraham was circumcision, which became the distinctive and continuing entrance rite of Judaism.²

In various cultures circumcision was—and still is—employed at puberty as the sign of a male child's transition into adulthood. In early Judaism, however, circumcision was connected not with puberty but with admission to the covenant community. Although there is no direct connection between infant circumcision in

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Judaism and infant baptism in Christianity, the principle was established early in our remote heritage that one may enter into the mystery of a special relationship with God at the beginning of one's life, long before conscious commitments are possible.

As in other ancient religions, primitive Judaism used water symbolically to wash away cultural and religious impurities. Uncleanness resulted when a person got a shade too close to the elemental mysteries of life: the touching of semen or menstrual discharge, an intimate involvement with childbirth or illness, the handling of a dead body.³ Such uncleanness was a barrier to one's relationship with God, the source and sustainer of life's mysteries. Although ritual washings were undertaken by the tainted individuals themselves, it was the responsibility of the priests to see that ceremonial purity was maintained, for they were set apart to mediate between God and God's people.

A quantum leap in the understanding of religious impurity came with the prophetic insight of later Judaism that not only individuals but a whole people could become unclean. Moreover, this corporate defilement stemmed not from things physical but from spiritual attitudes and behavior that were totally unacceptable to God. The word of divine judgment was transmitted with special potency by Ezekiel to the people of Israel who had drifted away from their covenant with God and had been punished for it:

When the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their doings; their conduct before me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. So I poured out my wrath on them. . . . I scattered them among the nations. But I had concern for my holy name. . . . And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name. . . . For I will . . . gather you from all the countries and bring you to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.⁴

Ezekiel pointed to the promise of a new Passover, a new Exodus, a new traversing of the wilderness, a new entry into Canaan. The vision of an entirely new Exodus into a completely new land stirred memories of the Red Sea crossing and firmly fixed the powerful image of passing through the waters of salvation in order to gain an altogether new existence.

The process of cleansing and restoring a former relationship with God was judged by the prophets as no longer sufficient. A totally new covenant would be needed, and Jeremiah and others began to develop that theme. Groundwork was being laid for the eventual emergence of the Christian baptismal covenant.

In late Judaism a number of new religious communities came into being which made various attempts to establish a new and purer relationship with God. Washing with water became widespread. The Essenes at Qumran took daily baths. They devised and installed an elaborate water system so that the entire community could wash before the sacred meal was held. Their settlement was carefully located on the cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea in order to await, in the most strategic spot, the expected fulfillment of the new Exodus foretold in Isaiah 40.⁵

Among the Pharisees a rite of washing was used to mark the admission of members to this narrow sect from the wider body of Judaism. Significantly, women and children were as eligible for washing and inclusion as males.

Though the progression was spontaneous, ragged, and discontinuous, a washing rite eventually emerged as part of the process of admission of gentile proselytes into Judaism. Baptism was linked with circumcision at first and then began to emerge as a separate rite. Women, who were not subject to circumcision, were eligible for proselyte baptism along with men. By the first century B.C., rabbis were discussing whether both circumcision and baptism were necessary or whether baptism alone would suffice.

With the arrival of John the Baptist, the notion of baptism took off in a new direction. This dramatic figure, who incorporated both priestly and prophetic functions, proclaimed a profound and forceful eschatological message. He announced that the Messianic Age was about to arrive, that radical judgment was at hand. He understood that baptism was more than a cleansing from ritual impurity or an admission ticket to Judaism; he preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."⁶ John's message was not aimed at proselytes; it was not addressed to foreigners; it was directed to his own people, the Jews, who had repudiated their heritage and stood in need of intrinsic renewal. Unlike other

washing rites of late Judaism, John's baptism was not self-administered in a kind of easy, do-it-yourself manner. Nor was his baptism repeatable; it was intended to be done only once. The Baptist was concerned with more than helping people deal with transitory religious dislocations; he wanted to bring them to an ultimate and eternal reorientation. Despite the strength and severity of his message, John understood his water baptism to be provisional and preparatory. Another was coming, he said, who will baptize with fire and spirit. John himself would baptize that other one, Jesus of Nazareth.

No one is sure of Jesus' understanding of his own baptism at the hands of John. But the church from the earliest days until now has identified at least three interwoven strands of meaning. It was, first of all, a sign of his incorporation into the human condition. In his baptism Jesus "was numbered with the transgressors," as one of the servant passages in Isaiah puts it.⁷ In the second place, his baptism was the empowering action for Jesus' gradually unfolding mission. The descent of the Spirit was the sign of that. Third, the mission launched by Jesus' baptism would involve suffering and death. It is more than coincidence that some ancient versions of the passion narrative in Mark pick up Isaiah's transgressors theme.⁸

Ultimately, Jesus' baptism can only be understood in the context of his death and resurrection. He spoke of his coming death as his *baptisma*, a word that is found in the New Testament and subsequent Christian writings and nowhere else. In an ominous discourse about the costs of discipleship, Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!"⁹ As the inevitability of his own death became increasingly apparent to Jesus, he seemed to see it as a baptism for all people, a cleansing in which everyone would be able to participate. When the Zebedee brothers impetuously sought to be granted places of honor at his side, Jesus, knowing the painful road ahead, chided them. "You do not know what you are asking," he said. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"¹⁰

Even though the two disciples had no inkling of the ramifications of their question, let alone the meaning of Jesus' answer at that point, he knew that the *baptisma* of his death and resurrection would indeed be theirs one day. So he could say to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized."¹¹

One of the enigmas of the New Testament is whether or not Jesus himself actually inaugurated the practice of Christian baptism. Can it truly be said to be one of the two sacraments ordained by Christ, as many of us learned in the catechism?¹² There are two confusing references in John's gospel, one indicating that Jesus administered baptism and one reporting that it was only his disciples who baptized.¹³ The synoptic gospels are silent on the matter. The fourth evangelist gives the impression that the baptizing of Jesus parallels the baptizing of John, but that Jesus and/or his disciples ceased such activity after John was imprisoned. Jesus' ministry was focused on declaring—and demonstrating—that the Kingdom of Heaven was breaking into human history in a new way. The importance of baptism with water for the repentance of sins after the fashion of the Baptist may have begun to diminish in the minds of Jesus and his followers in anticipation of a new and more powerful baptism to come, a baptism consisting of the fresh outpouring of God's Spirit.

Scholars disagree about the authenticity of the endings of the gospels according to Mark and Matthew, with their inferences that Jesus envisioned the emerging church as a baptizing community. But the first Christians clearly believed that baptism was a central part of their mandate. As Aidan Kavanagh points out, the early church may have seen the basis for baptism as a sacrament "given by Christ," not so much in Jesus' own baptism or a verbal set of marching orders to the disciples, as in his passion and death. "Subsequent tradition (e.g., Romans 6) will look back to this event and its results rather than to John's baptisms or to Jesus' own baptism at his hands as the proximate foundation for Christian baptismal teaching and practice."¹⁴

Early clues to the significance of baptism in the post-Easter church are found in Luke/Acts, and especially in the writings of

Paul. The Lucan material associates three meanings with baptism. (1) It is the sign that one's sins have been forgiven. (2) It is an assurance that one has come under the protection of the name of Jesus. (3) In congruence with the major thrust of Luke/Acts, it is associated with the gift of God's Spirit.

The connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit in this early tradition is crucial but less than precise. At the beginning, the gift of the Spirit was not inextricably bound to the action of water baptism. In some instances the gift of the Spirit preceded baptism (the conversion of Saul, for example);¹⁵ in others, the Spirit was received after baptism (as when Peter and John visited newly baptized converts in Samaria).¹⁶

A third element was part of the process of initiation in the primitive church. The exercise of water baptism and the gift of the Spirit—in whatever order those two events came—always involved the proclamation of the Good News. Spirited preaching often resulted in a further cycle of baptism, reception of the Spirit, and proclamation. As Aidan Kavanagh puts it,

Both water baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit are necessary, but it is of less importance to note which comes first than to realize how *both* follow upon the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. All three of these events—proclamation, baptism, and the outpouring of Spirit—constitute the integrity of initiation into the believing community, the locale of the Spirit which is the Church.¹⁷

From the outset, then, baptism was the quintessential sacrament of mission. Baptism was the logical conclusion of a process of evangelization, to be sure. But we also note that the baptism of new Christians was truly fulfilled as they in turn began to share the gospel with others, hence keeping the missionary cycle going.

The letters of Paul begin to explore the metaphysical mutations of the central baptismal themes. In Pauline literature baptism is variously described as a way of shedding pagan values and putting on Christ; as a form of adoption into sonship; as the reception of an inheritance; as a commitment to obedience, as well as a free act of grace; as incorporation into one body; as dying and rising with Christ; as a kind of rebirth. Each of these rich new images

made its own contribution in helping Christians grasp the mystery of the sacrament, though in the aggregate their theological and symbolical fecundity tended to be overwhelming. Despite the elaborations of his baptismal theology, it is important to note that Paul, one of the most influential of the postpaschal converts to the faith, understood baptism to be a single, continuous rite which included washing, anointing, and sealing with the Spirit. A key Pauline passage is I Corinthians 6:11:

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Here, as elsewhere in Pauline literature, washing and sealing with the Spirit are clearly understood to be part of an indivisible process.¹⁸

The unity of baptismal action is largely inferred from what is written in the New Testament. The earliest detailed description of baptism which documents its comprehensive nature is *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, a Roman liturgy of the early third century. The initiatory rite described in this document encompasses baptism, anointing by a presbyter, confirmation or the laying-on of hands with episcopal consignation, and first communion. Not only did the liturgy involve one extended and continuous action, it was also broadly inclusive. Men and women, infants and older children were all regarded as suitable candidates for full initiation. A narrative adapted from *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* gives the flavor of Christian initiation in the primitive church:

It is well before dawn on the first day of the week in Rome in the spring of a year in the first decade of the third century. Somewhere in the distance a rooster crows to announce the approach of the sun's first rays. Individuals and small groups of people move through shadowy streets toward a large house that has been converted into a place of worship.

Inside a small band of believers has been meeting for several days with a larger group of people who are preparing to become Christians. The catechumens, as the recruits are called, have been in training for three years. They have been tested in every way about the quality of their faith. They have attended corporate worship regularly, always sitting apart

from those already baptized, always being dismissed after hearing the word proclaimed but before the bread is broken and the wine shared.

During the final phase of their preparation the catechumens have experienced the stiffest personal examination yet. Their piety, their understanding, their works of mercy have all been carefully scrutinized. The last examination is always done by the bishop himself. On Thursday night before the dawning Sunday the catechumens bathed themselves as a sign of their readiness. On Friday and Saturday they fasted and prayed. In an all-night vigil on Saturday night they listened to scripture and other pious readings, and periodically the bishop said prayers of exorcism over each individual to dispel any remaining evil spirits.

As dawn now breaks the congregation is assembled in the main room of the house church. In another place, most likely in the garden with its pool and running fountain, prayer is said by the priest over the water. The candidates for baptism remove all of their clothing as a sign of leaving their past ways behind. Children are baptized first, speaking for themselves if they are able; otherwise parents or other relations answer for them. Male candidates are next, followed by women catechumens.

The baptismal ritual takes this shape. The priest anoints each candidate with "the oil of exorcism," previously blessed by the bishop. Then the priest asks if the catechumen believes in the triune God. After confessing faith in each person of the Trinity, the candidate is completely submerged in the water—three times in all—and then is anointed with "the oil of thanksgiving." Each new Christian is dried, vested in fresh white garments and brought into the main body of the church. There the bishop lays hands on each one, prays for the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit and does a final anointing with "the oil of thanksgiving." The neophytes take their place with the rest of the faithful and all exchange the peace.

Immediately the congregation proceeds to the Eucharist, which includes not only bread and wine but also a mixture of milk and honey as a sign to the new Christians that God's promise to Israel has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These new Roman Christians fully understand that they have participated in the death and resurrection of Christ through their baptism, for they recall the powerful image that the great St. Paul used in the letter he wrote to the church in Rome a hundred and fifty years before. They have heard it read and reread many times.

The service is completed. The Christians return to their homes or to their jobs taking care not to attract too much attention. Forces in Rome are still very hostile to this new and different religion.¹⁹

As early as the fourth century, the unified nature of Christian initiation began to break down. When the Edict of Milan was promulgated in 313, the Christian church was freed from persecution. Missionary activity came out into the open and accelerated, and in time the number of baptisms increased dramatically. Bishops, who previously had played the central sacerdotal role in baptism, couldn't keep up sacramentally with the rapid growth of the church. There were two basic responses to this new phenomenon. (1) Eastern and some western churches gave the local priest full authority for administering the comprehensive rite of initiation. (2) Oil blessed by the bishop of the area was used by the local priest to complete the rite.²⁰

During the first half of the middle ages, a variety of initiation practices developed in the west. In some places initiation split into two distinct actions, with priests administering baptism on one occasion and bishops anointing and laying hands on new Christians at some subsequent time. In other circles baptism and consignation remained together well into the eighth century and beyond. In still other Latin churches there was no episcopal consignation at all, only a post-baptismal anointing done by the priest in the eastern fashion. Despite the variations in practice, the trend was toward a complete bifurcation of the unified primitive initiatory rite. By the arrival of the scholastic period, arguments were being recounted to designate the detached episcopal action a separate sacrament. What had begun as a practical expedience was taking on a troublesome theological rationale. The difficulty with solving the problem by creating two discrete rites was that in the corporate mind of the western church the full bestowal of the Holy Spirit became dislodged from baptism.

During the late middle ages, the baptismal liturgy was refined and standards for admission to the church were relaxed. Because a majority of the candidates were now children, the threefold responsive use of the creed was replaced by a brief triune formula recited solely by the priest at the moment of baptism. The combined use of pouring and immersion was replaced by total immersion alone, a practice that remained in force until the fourteenth century when pouring became the normative method of baptism. During this period the previously rigorous catechu-

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menate was simplified. By the eleventh or twelfth century, babies were baptized with no preparation at all.

The Protestant Reformation brought with it an intense and liberating devotion to Holy Scripture. For the reformers there was only one basic sacrament: God's Word. Individual sacraments were particular manifestations of that Word. The key ingredient in the sacraments was the faith of the believer. Sacraments performed without faith and understanding on the part of the participants were thought to verge on mere magic. The Reformation gave a certain impetus to believers' baptism. In churches that stemmed from the anabaptist movement it became the norm, although the state reformed churches, including the Church of England, continued the practice of infant baptism.

In the Council of Trent, Roman Catholicism responded to Protestant baptismal trends by placing stress on the basics: The sacrament is effective when it is rightly administered. A physical sign is necessary (e.g., water in baptism). God's power is at work in the sacrament objectively; therefore, grace is operative in infant baptism independent of the baby's faith. Faith is involved, Trent asserted, in adult candidates and in the parents and sponsors of infant candidates.

Throughout the centuries, from the beginning of the church until now, the Eastern Orthodox churches have managed to keep the initiatory rite intact. A unified sacrament normally administered at infancy combines water baptism, chrismation with episcopally consecrated oil, and first communion. Conversely, the churches of the west have evolved a confusing variety of positions and practices as a result of the division of the primitive rite. Peter Hinchcliff sums up the muddled situation:

The western fragmentation led some [churches] to treat confirmation as a separate and second giving of the Spirit; others to treat it as a renewal of vows and regard water-baptism as the complete and only sacrament of initiation; yet others to insist on water-baptism of believers, reject infant baptism, and abandon confirmation.²¹

Contemporary liturgical trends offer some hope that Christians may be moving slowly toward a new consensus about their rites

of initiation. Similar questions are being raised by scholars and pastors of the major Christian traditions. Few seem content with the status quo. Many feel attracted toward the simplicity, integrity, discipline, and power of the initiatory practices of the early church. The challenge is to see how what was valid and useful at the outset can be transposed to the present time without being either slavish or sentimental.

CHAPTER TWO

Three Central Issues

THE foregoing analysis of the history of Christian initiation has been selective rather than exhaustive. It was intended to focus on certain key issues which are of interest not only to liturgical scholars but especially to liturgical practitioners, diocesan bishops and pastors of local congregations. The questions raised cluster in three major areas. (1) What is the appropriate age for baptism? Are there any preconditions for the administration of this initial sacrament? What preparation should be required? (2) When should one be admitted to communion? (3) What is the nature of confirmation and when should it occur?

In dealing with these questions myself, I have come to clear and firm conclusions. They arise out of my studies of Christian initiation, my instincts as a twentieth-century Christian, and my experience as a parish priest who has prepared hundreds of people for baptism. My conclusions are not the only ones possible, given the massive amount of data available and the wide variety of theological positions held today. My presently held convictions may become dated as historical circumstances change, but I believe they are rooted solidly in Christian tradition, make sense for our times, and reflect in general the direction in which the mainstream liturgical churches are moving. Given the need for a sound and closely reasoned position on Christian initiation today, I will argue these convictions as persuasively as I can.

The Baptism of Infants and Adults

Since the roots of Christian baptism reach back into Hebrew practice, there is precedence, first in circumcision and then in

subsequent sectarian washing rites, for the initiation of infants into the household of God. In the earliest days of the church both adults and infants were baptized, though specific references to babies are few. Acts reports that Lydia *and her whole household* were baptized after Paul and Timothy preached in Philippi.¹ A similar corporate baptism took place in the same city when an earthquake freed Paul and Silas from prison. After listening to the two missionaries preach, we are told, a deeply moved jailer "was baptized at once, *with all his family*."² In the first chapter of I Corinthians, Paul indicates that while he himself baptized sparingly, he "did baptize also *the household* of Stephanas."³ Presumably these various families would have included at least some small children.

In a pagan civilization the greatest bulk of initial converts to the Christian way were bound to be adults. Infants and older children would have been in a subsidiary position until successive generations produced continuing Christian families. However, it seemed to be the clear intention of the primitive church to be inclusive of all ages, rather than exclusive. Peter's speech on Pentecost reflected that inclusiveness when he exhorted the crowd to "Repent, and be baptized *every one of you*. . . ."⁴ If there had been any prohibition against the baptism of children, it would be mentioned somewhere in primitive Christian writing. No restriction appears. Even at that, the tendency in the early days was to postpone baptism until late in life, for as Price and Weil note, "*it was held that sins committed after baptism could not be forgiven*." One was baptized at an early age only if death threatened."⁵

Parallel to the *practice* of the early church there was also a *faith position* which argued in favor of the full inclusion of children. That stance is rooted in the teaching of Jesus that God's kingdom belongs to those who are like little children. "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁶ It is inconceivable that the Lord of the church, who spoke so warmly of the simple perceptions of children, would refuse them full inclusion in his household. There is a further point to be made. Since Jesus enjoined all people to live their spiritual lives like little children, it is vitally important to the church that children be included fully

and taken seriously as signs and models of humility, receptivity, acceptance, dependence, and simplicity. Children are mentors as well as learners.

At the outset the church associated baptism with the concept of rebirth. The idea that our physical birth is followed by a new birth in the Spirit underscores the childlike nature of one's beginning in the life of faith, as well as in the initial stages of corporeal life. The theme of rebirth is strongly stressed in *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*, one of the earliest extant descriptions of baptism (Rome, A. D. 160):

Then they are led by us to a place where there is water, and they are reborn after the manner of rebirth by which we also were reborn: for they are then washed [or, wash themselves] in the water in the Name of the Father and Lord God of all things, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.⁷

The powerful metaphor of the two births—physical and spiritual—reminds us how both growth and grace come to us independently of consciousness and will. One does not need to be aware of what it means to be a developing human being in order to be one. Knowledge and awareness come with time. By the same token, one does not have to understand the demands and benefits of the Christian way in order to be a part of it. Understanding and acceptance come as the spirit matures in the life of the community of faith.

The primary thrust of the primitive church in both belief and practice was to include adults as well as children within the full life of the faith community. As has already been noted, the church in the east has not deviated from that emphasis, while the church in the west has experienced a disturbing disintegration of the unity and coherence of Christian initiation. Nathan Mitchell has written a helpful essay that gives four reasons for the deterioration of baptismal unity in the west.⁸

First, Mitchell suggests, too much symbolism had accrued to the rite. Washing, sealing, incorporation, death and resurrection, and the other powerful themes of the sacrament led to an overload of meaning which was more than one liturgical action could bear.

Second, many of the symbols of baptism had lost their intelligibility. They no longer set off a chain reaction of meaning that instructed and moved a majority of the people. Third, the tactile dimension of baptism had slipped away. Early baptism involved immersion, anointing, imposition of hands, kissing. The later replacement of physical signs with verbiage led to a loss of potency. Fourth, confusion developed over the place and function of *epiclesis* (invocation of the Spirit) and *anamnesis* (remembrance) in baptism. The language of imitation and obedience tended to creep into the baptismal rite, displacing the earlier vocabulary of memory and invocation. Mitchell ponders the possibility

that once baptism came to be viewed primarily as imitative behavior (as memorial in the weakest sense), it seemed more and more necessary to complete or perfect or simply finish the act of baptism by a separate, ritual act of *epiclesis*—confirmation.⁹

As a result, confirmation became a “dangling *epiclesis*,” a clumsy western way of attending to the unfinished business of baptism.

There may be another reason for the breakdown of Christian initiation in western Christendom. In the early centuries of the Christian era the catechumenate was taken with utmost seriousness. Three years of preparation for baptism were demanded in many places; a full year would have been a minimal requirement in certain circumstances. Mass evangelism and rapid growth in the first five centuries of the Christian era caused the church to strengthen and elaborate prebaptismal training. Ironically, the very success of evangelistic activity, resulting in the Christianization of Europe, eventually led to the diminution of serious preparation for baptism. The Christian presence was beginning to be taken for granted. By the high middle ages the preparation of adults had not only been simplified but had become sloppy and perfunctory. Little or no preparation was required for the parents and sponsors of infants in many places, a situation that was exacerbated by a headlong rush to baptize those newborn infants who were not expected to survive.

Lack of adequate catechesis was bound to be a concern of the reformers, since faith commitment was increasingly seen to be a

crucial part of initiation. Many leaders of the reformation insisted that baptisms be held in the church when the congregation was present in great numbers. Calvin, for example, drew up an order for baptism that required children to be brought to church either on Sunday afternoon at the time of catechism or on weekdays after the morning sermon. The service opened with a long discourse delivered by the minister on the meaning of baptism, presumably an attempt to inject preparatory instruction into the bargain.¹⁰

The radical reformers went much further. The anabaptists proceeded to jettison infant baptism entirely, and to require the re-baptism of adults who had been baptized as infants. Prebaptismal catechesis was reintroduced and baptisms began "with an examination of the candidate's grasp of basic doctrine."¹¹

The various reforms of baptism within budding Protestantism lead one to ponder how history would have been different if the catholic church of the west had held fast to firm standards of preparation of adult candidates and the parents and godparents of infant candidates. Do the steadfast Orthodox offer a clue? Even here the story is not encouraging. Despite an adherence to primitive liturgical forms, the churches of the east have experienced their own kind of baptismal degeneration. The distinguished Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann excoriates his own tradition by describing current initiatory practice as "a decadent liturgy supported by a decadent theology . . . leading to a decadent piety."¹² He argues that the piety of the contemporary Christian is no longer baptismal, as it was for the earliest believers, hence baptism has lost its power to shape our worldview. In the past, a Christian was called into a new relationship with all life through his baptism. With a debased sacrament of initiation there is virtually no difference between the values of the church and the ideals of the world.¹³ If the experience of the church is to become baptismal again, Schmemmann contends, Christians must rediscover the true meaning of baptism,

not Baptism itself, which is here with us unchanged, unaltered in its essence, nor its rites, which mutilated as they are essentially remain the same, but their *meaning* and thus their *power* in us. And this can only be done through *education*, which—in the early Church at least—was always understood as the indivisible unity of *teaching, liturgical experi-*

ence, and *spiritual effort*. It is this *unity* that, more than anything else, we need today: doing what we believe, believing what we do, living in accordance with what we believe and with what, through “doing,” is given to us as life and power.¹⁴

Contemporary liturgical reforms are placing a new emphasis on adult baptism. This is particularly evident in the Roman Catholic Church’s construction of separate rites for the baptism of children and adults. In discussing Rome’s *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Aidan Kavanagh contends that

the document’s purpose is less to give liturgical recipes than to shift the Church’s initiatory polity from one conventional norm centering on infant baptism to the more traditional norm centering on adults. Nowhere does the document say this in so many words. If this is not the case, however, then the document not only makes no sense but is vain and fatuous. Its extensive and sensitive dispositions for gradually incorporating adult converts into communities of faith nowhere suggest that this process should be regarded as the rare exception. On the contrary, from deep within the Roman tradition it speaks of the process presumptively as normative.¹⁵

Although the Episcopal Church has retained a single rite for the baptism of persons of all ages, adults and older children are presented first, followed by younger children and infants. This order has been fixed because, as one commentator writes, “the baptism of adults is historically and theologically normative.”¹⁶

The suggestion that the baptism of adults is normative, both historically and theologically, may lead us down a slippery path. There is no question that adults came to baptism first and in the largest numbers at the beginning of the Christian church. That is the historical precedent, though it is interesting to recall that in *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* children being presented were actually baptized before adult candidates. Theologically, however, it would seem dangerous to imply that the baptism of infants or children is somehow abnormal. That position tends to put younger Christians back into the inferior status from which modern liturgical renewal has sought to release them.

The standard for the admission of people into a process leading to baptism is that they be ready and desirous.¹⁷ For infants and

small children the intention must reside with the parents and sponsors. If we believe that God's grace is operative independent of human will, then that grace is operative in infant baptism. Numerous analogies may be drawn. Children cannot make up their own minds about what language to speak, for example, until they learn some language with which to make up their own minds. Food and medicine are given to babies without their consent or understanding because it is the parents' desire (and the children's incipient desire) that they be healthy. The child's readiness and desire are held in trust for a time by the parents. For adults, of course, the decision is their own.

As we have noted, a major cause of the devaluation of Christian initiation is the slippage that has taken place, in both east and west, in the preparation of candidates and/or sponsors. The resolute efforts of Vatican II to restore the adult catechumenate attest to this, as does the indictment of Professor Schmemann. The crucial element in the tension between infant and adult baptism, therefore, is not the appropriate age but the seriousness with which preparation is undertaken. The initiation of new Christians will not be superficial if imaginative and extensive catechesis is involved beforehand and continues afterward, as well.

The manner of preparation for sponsors of children will obviously be different from the training of adult candidates. Children learn to speak their first language in one way, while adults who are trying to master a new tongue use a very different process. For a growing child language is appropriated in a gradual, nonanalytical way. Parents and other important people around the child are the teachers, and the degree of their dedication to the task makes a huge difference. Adults, on the other hand, may learn in a more ordered and intentional way, reading books, using dictionaries, enrolling in courses, listening to tapes, conversing with others, visiting the place where the new language is spoken. So it is in taking hold of that nonverbal idiom called faith. People claim it in different ways, but the opportunity must be provided; and the more intentional the effort, the more swift and sure the appropriation.

A period of consolidation follows one's initiation into the household of faith. By virtue of their baptism, younger and older Christians alike are committed to continuing "in the apostles' teaching

and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers,"¹⁸ which means the educational, communal, and worship life of the church. How those resources are utilized will differ between adults and small children, but if they are approached with purposefulness and integrity they should provide an adequate context for the nurture and renewal of the neophytes. Those who were baptized as children will come to a time in life when they will need to validate the promises that were made for them at baptism. To help them address that moment responsibly, a thoughtful process of education will be required. It is the responsibility of the local congregation to order its corporate life to that end.¹⁹

Admission to Communion

It is the basic premise of this study that baptism is full initiation into the total life of the church. All rights and responsibilities devolve upon the new member immediately and are appropriated at different levels of meaning as the Christian person matures. Infants obviously cannot vote in congregational meetings or take leadership roles, but they can participate fully in the sacramental life of the church for they have natural access to the subliminal, noncognitive, mysterious power conveyed in the signs or tokens of God's grace in action. If all that is true, how did immediate admission to communion come unglued from baptism?

The Orthodox have consistently carried on the church's primitive practice of administering communion to the newly baptized, whether infant or adult. The Latin church of the west, however, simply allowed the eucharistic feeding of infants to lapse in a characteristically unplanned and haphazard way.

Evidence from the twelfth century indicates that infants in some places were given only the consecrated wine by means of the priest's dipping his finger into the wine and then placing it in their mouths. Later when the laity communicated in one kind only—the bread—infant communion died out in the West, and had generally ceased by the sixteenth century, with rare exceptions.²⁰

The Protestant reformers were more deliberate in prying communion loose from baptism. Luther, for instance, produced no

order of confirmation, but he did issue two catechisms to be learned by children before they were admitted to communion. Cranmer's Prayer Book of 1549 was also highly restrictive. A rubric which required that no one would be confirmed unless he could recite the creed, Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments, brought to an end the confirmation of infants, hence their immediate admission to communion. This was nailed fast by a concluding rubric in the service of confirmation which specifically prohibited admission to communion before confirmation. Although the intent of that direction seemed to be that no one would receive the sacrament unless it could be done with understanding, the origins of the rubric go back to the Council of Lambeth in 1281, where the aim was not to limit access to communion but to encourage all baptized persons to be confirmed.²¹

The proposition that understanding is the key to sacramental effectiveness keeps surfacing with a strange kind of inconsistency. Daniel Stevick asks those who happily baptize infants but want to postpone communion,

If understanding is required for receiving the Communion, why is it not required for Baptism? If infancy does not exclude a person from one of the sacraments of initiation, why should it exclude him from the other? Any argument against admitting children to the Eucharist argues equally against baptizing them.²²

Just as babies have no need to understand the dynamics of parental love in order to sense, to know that they are loved through touch, sight, and sound, so they do not have to have a theological grasp of the eucharist in order to be fed by it. Adults, for that matter, are as wonderfully mystified by love—and by the nature of the eucharist—as children are.

It has been said, in an interesting double negative, that no Christian should remember a time when he wasn't fed at God's table. The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church has stated that "confirmation not be regarded as a procedure of admission to Holy Communion"²³ because baptism confers that right. It is appropriate, therefore, for each new Christian to receive communion at the conclusion of the baptismal rite as the completion of

full initiation. For infants this could be in the form of a crumb of bread and a drop of wine. The practicality of successive regular communions for small Christians have to be worked out between the parents and the parish priest. What is crucial is the provision of methods and opportunities in the local church to help parents and growing children at each developmental stage of life to gain deeper appreciation of the sacrament.

The Nature and Timing of Confirmation

A review of the history of Christian initiation shows that a variety of practices have developed among the various traditions. Some churches have set the significant entry point close to the time of birth; others have fixed that point at adolescence or beyond; still others remain ambivalent and have stretched out the initiatory process so that it spans early baptism and later confirmation with admission to communion coming either before or after confirmation. There may now be a trend among the churches to return to the early Christian practice of a single initiatory rite which is equally available to children and adults. If greater clarity and integrity is developing around a primary and complete rite of initiation, what can be said about the need to renew the actions which were taken at a prior and perhaps very different point in life?

From the earliest days of the church the eucharist has been the regular occasion by which Christians renew their baptismal commitment to God, and at which God, in turn, nourishes and strengthens those in whom a new life in the Spirit has begun. Since people experience various stages of growth and maturity and since most lives are marked by certain unpredictable and often dramatic turning points, the church has provided a series of pastoral/sacramental rites to mark and enrich major milestones, such as marriage, childbirth, serious sin and alienation, vocational decisions, sickness, death. All of these rites grow out of and are linked to the basic baptismal covenant between God and the believer. Acknowledging honestly the fact that the intensity of religious conviction waxes and wanes in the life of every person, it

also makes sense to provide other formal occasions and mechanisms for mature Christians to renew their basic baptismal commitments, perhaps more than once during the course of a lifetime.

The Book of Common Prayer, as it is presently constituted, offers a workable format for marking a variety of crossroads in one's spiritual journey. The initiatory rite clearly intends baptism to admit candidates fully into the life of the church. Admission to communion should follow immediately, but in this time of pluralistic practices it may take place at a later point for some infants, depending on parish policies and parental preferences. There are several options for people who reach critical points of renewal later on in life. For those who were fully initiated as Christians early in life but who have never made a mature and personal avowal of their baptismal covenant, there is a ritual called Confirmation.* For those who are moving from another Christian tra-

*There is considerable controversy over the use of the concept and terminology of confirmation in the context of the renewal of baptismal promises some years after the baptism has taken place. Liturgical reformers believe that the primitive notion of confirmation is an integral part of a single and complete rite of initiation. I share that view. The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church originally proposed a baptismal rite that reflected this position, but it did not survive the political process that led to the adoption of the 1979 Prayer Book. What was authorized (and is currently operative) is a baptismal liturgy reflecting full initiation (including chrismation and admission to communion) plus a subsequent ambiguous rite which may be viewed by some as the sacramental completion of baptism and by others as a pastoral/pedagogical occasion for the renewal of baptismal vows. I hold with the second of these two views, and this section of the book is an attempt to make the best possible use of an equivocal circumstance. The situation is, frankly, confusing; but it will have to be endured until the church has achieved a broader consensus about the nature of Christian initiation. It is hoped that this book will advance the conversation leading to consensus.

Reacting, by invitation, to the first draft of this chapter, Aidan Kavanagh made a number of provocative and helpful comments. I add them to this note to amplify the debate.

I view the concept of *confirmation* as a "ratification," "reaffirmation," or "validation" of one's baptism in infancy (a concept having a long history in the West) as fundamentally suspect because it is *mal posé*. The concept can only arise once confirmation, being misunderstood, floats away from baptism, thus finding itself in need of "new understandings" which then intensify the original misunderstanding. The upshot is that we *sacramentalize* what is normally an essentially *homiletical and pastoral* matter, i.e., we turn this into a debate on *confirmation* when in truth it is a matter of good preaching and ascetical and sacramental practice which precipitates growth in grace and faith. All this collapses into a debate on when *confirmation* should be administered, which short-circuits the

dition into the Episcopal church, there is a ritual called Reception, which is meant to mark an important transition without derogating anyone's previous experience as a Christian. For those who have already made a mature commitment to Christ—adults who have been baptized as adults or anyone who has been confirmed—there is a ritual called Reaffirmation. Reaffirmation is designed to mark a spiritual turning point, such as a return to active participation in the church after having lapsed for a while. Each ritual contains a sentence appropriate to the candidate's situation spoken by the bishop. Although the laying-on-of-hands is mandated for confirmation only, many bishops use this action or some other tactual sign to accompany the spoken formula.²⁴

With a process of full initiation and subsequent, optional renewal, such as the one put forward in the Book of Common Prayer, the matter of age moves into a subsidiary position. In recent centuries in the west confirmation seemed to be regarded as a rite of passage, marking the onset of adolescence. That may be of questionable value. To begin with, the concept of adolescence is a fairly modern notion that began to emerge as the dynamics of the industrial revolution started to supplant earlier rural rhythms. Nor is adolescence a clearly delineated period; it is an extended process that begins earlier for some people than for others and ends in a similarly unpredictable way. Moreover, the confusion and instability that marks pubescent years hardly makes them a suitable time for a mature decision about one's continuing religious stance. Parents and other people with whom this point has been discussed continue to insist that some kind of thorough review of the Christian faith take place around the time of adolescence. While this could be related to a rite of passage, the basic concern seems to be pedagogical and pastoral in nature, adults feeling a need for young people to have a clear grasp of Christianity before they begin to leave home (and also, most likely, the

far more crucial matters of pastoral polity. One "reaffirms" one's baptism in living, constantly, a Christian life; how *confirmation* "ratifies" or, even worse, "validates" one's baptism is most unclear to me. *All* the sacraments do these things—marriage, penance, holy orders, communion, etc. Is confirmation the *only* rite of passage we have after baptism? I think not. All sacraments, indeed all Christian life, are baptismal.

church for a while). Much more serious thinking and experimenting needs to be done on appropriate teenage rites of passage. In our society at least, the most appropriate ritual for adolescents may be a service of solemn intercessions at the moment the car keys are turned over to a youngster for the first time!

In view of our uncertainty about adolescence and rites of passage, the central criterion for the renewal of baptismal vows must not be chronology but the readiness of a person to move into a new phase of maturity in faith. This moment will be different for different people; it cannot be tied to a fixed point in time. Because everything is linked to individual development, the church will have to give up some of its customary but often empty routines. All twelve year olds will no longer report for confirmation instruction automatically. Great pastoral sensitivity will be required to know when the fulness of time has arrived for a particular person. Parishes will have to establish certain regular times when all members of the congregation are challenged to examine seriously the state of their lives in the light of their baptism. Processes of preparation will have to be ready to help those who find themselves at a turning point that may lead to confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation.

The beautiful thing about such an open system is that it is equally suited to young people and adults. It enables everyone to live within an atmosphere of spiritual parity. All were fully initiated into the body of Christ at baptism; all are expected to review and renew their baptismal covenant at appropriate times in their lives. No one has finally arrived and no one ever graduates from the system. For even as the initiation is permanent, so also is the journey unending.

CHAPTER THREE

Basic Principles For The Baptizing Community

CHRISTIANS often refer to the church as “The Body of Christ,” a designation that reflects the calling of the church to be the living organism through which Christ continues his ministry in the world. If the church is truly Christ’s body, then it must participate in his *baptisma*; it must continue to share in the death and resurrection experience through which humankind encounters salvation. The ecclesial sign of sustained participation in Christ’s *baptisma* is the baptism through which every Christian enters the grace-ful mystery of redemption. It is the life-saving, life-changing nature of baptism that makes it the fundamental sacrament of the Christian community. Without it the church does not exist. When it is devalued, discounted, put off to the side, the church is essentially weak. When baptism is seen as utterly basic and central, the church comes to life. Twin signs of primary renewal are seen when the church begins to take the sacrament seriously and accepts its own baptismal responsibility with equal dedication.

Taking the Sacrament Seriously

The active acceptance and application of certain working principles shows whether or not a particular segment of the church regards baptism as utterly central to its life and ministry. The presence of the following six indicators is critical.

Baptism is understood to be essential and primary. Probably because of the frequency with which it is celebrated and the importance of its sustaining power, the eucharist has tended to overshadow baptism. It is important to remember that baptism was the inaugural action of the earthly ministry of Jesus and may well have been exercised by his disciples long before the paschal meal was given its new sacramental significance. The early church clearly understood baptism to be initiatory, that is, the prerequisite to participation in Christian communal life, including sharing in the eucharist. All new life in the Spirit flowed from the initial baptismal action.

One of the earliest Christian theologians, St. Paul, saw baptism as more than an isolated action standing alone. The sacrament "derived its whole meaning from the gospel of which it was the enactment and effective representation."¹ A contemporary theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, puts it another way. Baptism is not one isolated means of grace among many, but rather

that essential act by which the Church always reveals and communicates her own faith, her "experience" of man and the world, of creation, fall and redemption, of Christ and the Holy Spirit, of the new life of the new creation, as indeed the source of the whole life of the church and of the Christian life of each one of us.²

Baptism is the primary sacrament in that it opens the door to the rest of the church's sacramental life. It is the beginning—but only the beginning. It is in no sense a destination to be arrived at; it is not a goal to be achieved; it is the conclusion of nothing. It is, rather, the launching of Christians on a lifelong journey of searching and probing the enigmas of existence, of contending with evil and injustice, of giving love and receiving it, of discovering with joy the unfolding wonders of God's creation.³

Baptism is permanent and not repeatable. The initial direction concerning the Prayer Book service firmly states that "the bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble."⁴ Although some churches in earlier, more contentious times resorted to re-baptism of those who had been duly initiated in another Christian tradition (and a few still do), most denominations today subscribe

to the nonrepeatable nature of the sacrament. That is not only a commendable sign of growing ecumenical respect, it also strengthens the integrity of baptism for everyone within the Christian household. When the efficacy of one form of baptism is questioned, all forms of baptism become questionable.

Because baptism happens only once and is utterly permanent, it is, quite naturally, compared to physical birth. The simile underscores the importance—and the excitement—that is meant to accompany initiation into the new life in Christ. The birthing of a new Christian should have the same effect on a congregation as the arrival of a new baby in a large but close-knit family. That there is too seldom an atmosphere of pride and exhilaration surrounding baptisms in local churches is evidence of a low level of investment in the importance of the sacrament. In parishes where baptisms are held publicly and frequently, however, one can increasingly see a dawning sense of ownership in the faces of the people who welcome the newborn into the family and vow to take responsibility for their nurture.

Baptism is operative on several levels of meaning at the same time. A person's Christian journey begins in the swirl of circumstances leading up to, surrounding, and moving away from baptism. The initiatory process involves subjective feelings about the event, unconscious perceptions of its significance, a certain amount of cognitive learning, an exercise of the human will, and the objective but not always observable activity of God's Spirit. These several levels of meaning are discerned by different participants in different ways. Although they do not share in conscious decision making, infant candidates appropriate more than we know through their senses and nascent intuition. Parents, priests, deacons, sponsors, adult candidates, members of the supporting congregation may be fully aware of all of the operative dimensions, yet the cerebral elements may speak more powerfully to one, while another may be primarily caught up in an emotional aspect of the moment. On a different occasion the modes of perception may shift for the various participants.

Because of the primal power of baptism, a tremendous amount of meaning is communicated both consciously and subliminally.

Much of it is stored away until some later, often surprising instant of awakening. In and through all of the dimensions of understanding, the Spirit of God is at work whether or not the participants are aware of it. No baptism, therefore, is empty of significance. More happens than is totally apparent at the time. This means that while Christians may rejoice over each celebration of the sacrament, they also must stand in awe before the power and responsibility that has been placed into the hands of the church.

Baptism is full inclusion into the household of faith. As we have seen, the intention of the primitive church was that baptism be a continuous three-stage rite which includes regenerative washing, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and inclusion in the eucharistic meal of the faithful community. Although the three stages became separated in Western Christianity for a variety of historical reasons, a reconnection process is happily under way. A positive result of baptism as total inclusion is that there are no second-class citizens in the commonwealth of Christians. All have equal rights and obligations, even though their capacities, desires, or abilities to exercise them may differ widely. Those churches that make a distinction between baptized members and communicants (for purposes of governance) or withhold communion from baptized persons (on grounds of maturity) are in an ambiguous, debilitating position. When baptism as complete initiation is acknowledged and acted upon, all kinds of corporate power is unleashed.

Baptism is appropriate for and available to persons of any age. There is sufficient historical evidence that full initiation into the church has not been, hence need not be, dependent upon chronology. All persons, whether child or adult, are defective in faith. All individuals, young or old, may be active or passive on different levels of their personhood and at various points in their development. All have a capacity for growth under the providence of God. All persons will take hold of the baptismal promise in their own way, in their own time. A Church of Scotland study of baptism done in the late 1950s puts forward this fascinating twin proposition: All baptized persons must become like a child, even like a newborn babe, in that they must learn to develop trust. Likewise

all new Christians must learn how to put on “the manhood of Christ” which involves taking mature responsibility for oneself.⁵ From this binocular perspective, therefore, the issue is not whether the most appropriate candidate for baptism is a child or an adult, for every candidate in reality must be *both* a child and an adult. Separate strategies must be developed and used for the inclusion of people of different ages, but accessibility is available to all.

*Baptism is ordination to the principal order of ministry.*⁶ The first ministers of the church were all lay persons. Distinctions between Christians initially seem to have been made on the basis of individual gifts or specific functions, not on the basis of hierarchical office.⁷ As the movement became institutionalized, specialized orders of ministry gradually took shape, so that by the third century the outlines of the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate were discernible, along with other lesser offices, such as subdeacon, reader, and acolyte. But it was clear that the three distinctive orders grew out of and in some ways remained a part of the primary order of ministry—the *laos*, the laity, the people of God. People were then—and are today—inducted into and invested with this basic order of ministry through Holy Baptism.

The new Prayer Book catechism has recaptured and reinforced for our time the understanding of the primitive church that there are four orders of ministry rather than three:

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.⁸

Note that the order of lay persons, the community of all baptized persons, comes first and is the underlying agency of Christ's ministry in the world. Other orders exist to help lay persons fulfill their primary, front-line tasks.

If baptism is the rite of admission into the first order of Christian ministry, then much more attention needs to be paid to preparing candidates for that intricate, lifelong calling. Adults will need to consider more than their personal relationship with Jesus Christ; they will also have to examine how they will serve him and his people in their work world and through their day-to-day associations with family, friends, and neighbors. Parents and sponsors of young candidates will need to help their charges develop a sense of Christian vocation as they grow into adulthood, so that they see their personal and work relationships as ways of revealing Christ to others. When that process is engaged in intently and purposefully, both before and after one's baptismal ordination to the laity, then the congregational sentence of welcome takes on tremendous meaning and power:

We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.⁹

Taking the Church's Responsibility Seriously

Not only must the church have a comprehensive view of baptism, it must also take seriously its own responsibility for the thorough and imaginative administration of the sacrament. Certain steps may be taken to help a local congregation become a lively and effective baptizing community. Here are some of the most important ones.

Develop and disseminate clearly stated parish policies on baptism. It is a thesis of this study that parishes with a high doctrine of baptism and a vigorous approach to the process of initiation will be vital centers of Christian life and witness. It would be an excellent investment, therefore, for pastors and people to spend ample time and energy in studying the nature of baptism and developing an overall parish plan for the inclusion of new Christians. Some of the material listed in the section on Selected Resources at the end of this volume will be helpful in getting started. A year would not be too long a time for a small group of clergy and laity to spend at the task. One result of such a period of study

would be the creation of a continuing process of Christian initiation that is suitable to the needs and resources of the congregation. The process should include written guidelines that explain the process to the members of the parish, the recruitment of candidates, the selection and training of persons to assist the priest in preparing people for baptism, and courses of preparation for the parents and sponsors of young candidates and for adult candidates and their sponsors. The plan should also encompass regular times for the teaching, preaching, and interpretation of the theological and liturgical dimensions of baptism within the congregation at large.

The fourth directional rubric at the end of the service of Holy Baptism suggests a way of constantly underscoring the centrality of the baptismal covenant. If no baptisms are scheduled on the four most appropriate Sundays of the church year, "the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, page 292, may take the place of the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist."¹⁰ Such a practice not only keeps the importance of baptism before the people, it also presents regular occasions on which the meaning of baptism may be dealt with homiletically. It would be especially helpful in stressing the centrality of baptism in small congregations where there are few baptisms.

Some parishes mark the birthdays of children, even adults, during the Sunday service. Would it not be more appropriate in the Christian community to observe the anniversaries of baptisms? Most of us probably couldn't give the date of our baptism without looking it up in the family archives. Yet we Christians believe that this moment when spiritual regeneration begins is as important as any other moment in our lives. Celebrating baptismal anniversaries is one way of keeping a pivotal event in the forefront of our consciousness and reminding us that the process of nurture and growth which started then still continues.

In response to the promptings of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has worked out extremely thorough initiatory processes for both children and adults.¹¹ They reach back into the discipline of the early church for content, practices, and terminology. The basic thrust of the Roman Catholic approach is highly commendable, but many, especially those out-

side the Roman communion, may find the procedures so elaborate and the language so remote as to be off-putting. In *The Book of Occasional Services*, the Episcopal Church has developed its own, much simpler approach to the adult catechumenate with appropriate rites to be used at various stages of the initiatory process.¹² Even this optional, streamlined format may appear too complicated for many congregations. When one gets beyond unfamiliar technical language, however, the process makes sense. Chapter 6 gives some specific and realistic suggestions for parishes that are just beginning to work at a new approach to Christian initiation. The experiences of several rather different parishes and one diocese (Chapter 7) will give further evidence of what is possible when a plan is worked out, tested, and refined.

Involve the entire congregation in the initiatory process. One of the criticisms the sixteenth-century reformers leveled at the medieval Latin rite of baptism was the prevalent custom of baptizing children at virtually any time in an almost empty church. They felt that such a practice diminished the importance of a sacrament and obscured the corporate nature of baptism.¹³ Baptism, even more than the eucharist, is the corporate sacrament *par excellence*, and that reality is spelled out liturgically. Four centuries after the Reformation, baptisms are increasingly taking place at one of the main Sunday services in the presence of the whole congregation or, at least, much of it. Along with the designated sponsors, the congregation stands to take responsibility for the nurture of new Christians. The entire gathering renews its baptismal promises as the candidates make theirs, which binds new and old Christians together on a mutual journey of faith and marks each person as both guide and follower, depending on the circumstances. At the conclusion of the rite it is the *laos*, the people, the corporate household, who welcome the initiates into the church of God.

What is expressed liturgically must be extended to other aspects of parish life as well. The ancient office of catechist, for instance, needs to be revived. In the third world church, where clergy are almost universally in short supply, lay catechists (by whatever name they may be called locally) are very often the prin-

cial agents of evangelism and primary Christian education. By contrast, the church in the west, especially in the United States, is hampered by an oversupply of clergy which sometimes leads to the usurping of the rightful ministries of lay persons. Restoration of the ministry of the catechist would enable a congregation to share baptismal preparation between trained clergy and trained lay people. Some parishes take great pains to educate lay readers both liturgically and theologically. When those readers rotate out of that function to give others a chance to participate, there is often no logical way for them to continue to use their training. Here is a marvelous opportunity to build a cadre of catechists who would help in the prebaptismal preparation and postbaptismal training of new Christians. In the process catechists could also serve as additional church-appointed sponsors to supplement those selected by the parents or the candidate. In some situations catechists may be available to help young persons at the time of their confirmation. In this and other ways the laity can begin to take greater responsibility for the initiation process.

Utilize the church year to stress the primacy of baptism. The liturgical churches, which place heavy emphasis on the Christian calendar, routinely teach that the start of the church year is the first Sunday of Advent. While that is strictly true, it provides a skewed perspective to the calendar and, therefore, to the entire cycle of worship and education in the church. Though it does not come at the beginning, the crucial, operative moment is the series of events that cluster around Easter. The extended meaning of the church year grows out of the celebration of the paschal mystery in which one may participate through baptism. That is why the first Christians scheduled all normal baptisms before dawn on Easter. That is why it is good pedagogy, as well as good liturgy, for the church as the baptizing community to arrange its baptismal cycle in accordance with the paschal event.

One way of fusing the baptismal cycle with the church year is illustrated by the diagram on page 91. The continuing spiral at the top represents the ongoing flow of what could be called "liturgical time" or "sacramental time." Each loop in the spiral does not depict an entire church year; it portrays, rather, a simple

baptismal cycle. The large circle on the diagram represents one baptismal loop or cycle.

A person aspiring to enter the Christian community embarks upon a period of preliminary preparation (P. P.) which includes a time of exploration (finding out what the expectations and requirements are) often called the precatechumenate, followed by a period of intensive preparation (I. P.), often referred to as the catechumenate. The normal time for this intensive period would be Lent, although some parishes may wish to employ a longer period of time, perhaps as much as a year, of which Lent would be the culmination. Full initiation (I.) into the Body of Christ takes place at Easter, the vigil being the favored time, although an early service on Easter Day is also an appropriate time. Full initiation, which encompasses baptism, sealing, and admission to the eucharist, is followed by a period devoted to the inclusion of the new Christian into the parish family so that he feels truly at home and discovers where he may make his particular contribution to the ecclesial community and the world beyond. This period could well cover the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. An ancient term for this period is *mystagogia*.

The rest of the baptismal cycle within the church year is peppered with various occasions for the steady renewal of one's promises. Every eucharist is such an occasion (small circles). The other premier baptismal days (Pentecost, All Saints Day or Sunday, and the First Sunday after the Epiphany) are other occasions for periodic renewal (squares). There is likely to be one or more major turning points in a person's spiritual journey. These are confirmation, reception, reaffirmation as described in Chapter 2. Such turning-point renewals (T. R.) should be preceded by an intensive period of reflection and preparation, perhaps during Lent, which could be termed review catechesis (R. C.). They are marked liturgically when the bishop visits, at which time brand new Christians may be receiving their full initiation through baptism.

Christian education and spiritual formation continue, of course, throughout the cycle by means of the regular Sunday and weekday educational ventures of the congregation. This process of continuing catechesis for all ages (triangles on the diagram) is a sign of the church's understanding of baptism as the beginning of a lifelong journey in faith.

The approach to a baptismal cycle described thus far may seem best suited to the incorporation of adults into the church. Where do infants and young children fit into such concepts as preliminary preparation, intensive preparation, inclusion, and continuing catechesis? It all seems very heady. They fit in where and as they can, picking up signs of importance and intimations of meaning with their own primitive but highly effective sensing devices. At the heart of the process for infants, too, are their parents, other significant adults, and the rest of the Christian community who provide the tremendously important intellectual and spiritual atmosphere within which they are raised.

In many parishes it is necessary to schedule baptisms more than once a year. The model baptismal cycle outlined here can be easily adapted to an Advent-Epiphany time frame, with preliminary preparation taking place in the fall, intensive preparation occurring during Advent, the baptism happening on Epiphany I (The Baptism of Our Lord), and the rest of the Epiphany season being the time of inclusion. The diagram indicates this variation. The cycle may also be adapted to dovetail with the other two premier baptismal Sundays or the bishop's visitation, but there is much to be said for attempting to adhere to the Lent-Easter and Advent-Epiphany sequences, because of the special power and meaning that already adhere to those seasons, and because they quite naturally suit the normal fall/spring patterns of most parish program years.

The foregoing depiction of the baptismal cycle is not the only pattern imaginable; it is offered as an illustration of how the church calendar can be used to advantage in constructing and interpreting a potent, rational process of initiation and renewal grounded in the paschal mystery, the *baptisma* of Christ himself.

Emphasize the essential connection between Christian initiation and Christian mission. As discussed earlier, the sacrament of baptism is the ordination of a Christian to ministry. Baptism encompasses both the delegation of authority and the empowerment for mission. It is a process of ignition that propels each Christian into the world in his own way and time.

Baptism is the source of mission; it is also, of necessity, the result of mission. If there were no outreach to the world, if the

church did not also evangelize its own, there would be no candidates and hence no baptisms. The church can survive, of course, by baptizing the children of its members. But in a world where Christians are a steadily shrinking minority, a diminishing church ultimately loses its impact on society. The Christian mission is more than a simplistic numbers game; yet if the church is to be effective in fulfilling its calling to share the good news with those who have not received it, a certain critical mass has to be sustained.

It may be the ultimate irony that at the very time when the adult catechumenate is being resurrected, there seem to be so few adults being brought forward for baptism, at least in the western world. On the other hand, renewed interest in Christian initiation may be a hopeful sign that the church is preparing itself for a new and important period of growth. In either case, the current recovery of enthusiasm for baptism is a challenge to the church, for none of the attention being given to the primal sacrament has much value unless there are candidates to initiate. A parish that wants to take itself seriously as a baptizing community must also learn to see itself as an evangelizing community.

To sum up, churches show signs of coming alive when Christian initiation is taken seriously. Sacramental seriousness is present when baptism is understood as essential and primary, as permanent and nonrepeatable, as operative on several levels of meaning at once, as full inclusion into the Christian household, as open and accessible to persons of all ages and as ordination to the basic order of Christian ministry. Ecclesial or organizational seriousness is present when thoughtful, realistic parish policies are developed and interpreted, when the whole congregation is consciously involved in the initiatory process, when the church year is intentionally related to the baptismal cycle, and when baptism and mission are seen as intimately interrelated. The rich harvest of spiritual food to be gained when parishes begin to work this fertile soil is incalculable.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Interlocking Themes of Baptism

BAPTISM is an extremely fecund sacrament. A careful study of the rite reveals an array of meanings so rich and closely interwoven as to strain the imagination. An attempt to separate out each baptismal theme and make sense of it alone and in concert with all the others gives credence to Nathan Mitchell's argument that baptism is seriously weakened when too much unexamined and unexplained symbolism adheres to the sacrament. He writes,

As long as people understand, through catechesis, how the various symbolisms in the cluster are related, the rite can maintain its cohesiveness. But such a cluster of accumulated symbols will begin to split apart if adequate catechesis declines.¹

It is the aim of this chapter to examine the multiple themes of baptism in such a way as to help us see and understand the major underlying elements of the sacrament. For simplicity's sake some sixteen motifs have been arranged in four categories: death and resurrection, incorporation, commissioning, and inaugurated eschatology. These four compartments are by no means watertight; related images and meaning tend to flow in and out of all of them. While each block of meaning has its own coherence and integrity, the four are definitely linked together and, indeed, grow out of each other in a remarkably logical progression.

Death and Resurrection

The first, most powerful and most complicated word about baptism has to do with dying and rising to new life. To plumb the

depths of this mystery we need to place it in the context of a Christian understanding of the human predicament.

Through an aboriginal process of perverse self-aggrandizement, the earliest human beings opened a destructive breach between themselves and the God who is the source of all life. The willful human tendency to usurp the power and authority of God—or to ignore it—has been endemic in our species ever since.

Over the course of time endless attempts were made at building bridges back to God. Those efforts always failed because people acted as if their wisdom, power, ingenuity, or worthiness alone was sufficient to the task. Human beings persisted in playing God.

In a way that we can only begin to fathom by the use of symbol and analogy, God at last took the initiative to close the gap through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By his complete and consistent obedience to the will of his Father, even to the point of death, Jesus restored the proper relationship that human beings are meant to have with the Divine Being. In response, God released Jesus from death and exalted him forever as the way of access to God.

Though still infected with the propensity to overinflate their egos and isolate themselves from divine dependence, men and women may now participate fully in the Christ-restored relationship with God. This is done by joining Christ's death and resurrection through a radical, life-changing act of faith, which involves accepting Christ as one's sole rescuer, putting one's complete trust in his love and favor, and following wherever his Spirit leads. Baptism is the ritual occasion that marks this profound act of faith. In the mysterious water of baptism, says the Prayer Book, "we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit."²

The death/resurrection theme is woven in and through the baptismal service, surfacing at critical points along the way. The first questions put to the candidates, the renunciations, deal with death. The candidates or their sponsors declare themselves as standing against all personal and corporate powers that attempt to put people in the place of God, or diminish or destroy God's creation, or seduce an individual away from the love of God. The

death called for here is the painful annihilation of deep-rooted selfishness upon which demonic forces play with great subtlety and ease. This is the first step in the process of conversion (literally turning around).

Once the candidates have turned their backs on what is wrong in this world, they are then ready to complete the revolutionary cycle by committing themselves to Jesus Christ, the personification of all that is good and true. More than that, they pledge to put themselves completely into the hands of Christ and to be infused and shaped by his Spirit dwelling in them. With that commitment embryonic Christians begin to stir with the new life that is being breathed into them.

As we have noted earlier, the death/resurrection theme emerges again in the great prayer of Thanksgiving over the Water, in which the community of faith prays that these new Christians who "are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior."³ Then each candidate is plunged (in most instances, only figuratively now) into the waters of baptism and is raised a new being in Christ. The power of the symbol of water is profound, for what is being typified is death by drowning to an old way of life and resuscitation by the breath of the Spirit to a new way of life. While the forcefulness of the symbol is weakened by the widespread practice of sprinkling or pouring, the reality of the radical change that takes place stands fast.

Subsumed within the death/resurrection theme are a number of other motifs associated with baptism. The remission of—or cleansing from—sins is at the heart of the conversion/acceptance process which the sacrament symbolically represents and objectively effects. The place of faith in the transaction is demonstrated in the action of the candidates who present themselves and make the conversional promises or, in the case of small children, in the action of the believing community which presents the candidates and assumes responsibility to see that the children grow into the promises made and come to understand and, eventually, reaffirm them. The overriding centrality of God's operative grace is summed up in a prayer of thanksgiving after the new Christians have been baptized. God is thanked for bestowing forgiveness on

the neophytes and in raising them to a new life of grace. Then God is asked to sustain the new Christians and give them the manifold gifts of the Spirit.

Incorporation

Baptism is the sacrament of dying and new birth; it is also the sacrament of incorporation. Incorporation in this context has a double meaning. Through baptismal rebirth Christians are in fact joined to Christ in an utterly remarkable and mysterious way. Paul, whose dramatic conversion and subsequent baptism had a profound effect upon him (and upon the fledgling church, too), understood full well the significance of incorporation into Christ. In the Epistle to the Romans, he wrote,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. . . . But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.⁴

By being united with Christ through baptism, the faithful are provided with divine power to overcome strangling self-centeredness (for Christ is now the center) and physical death (for Christ has been raised to eternal life). Incorporative new birth is complete liberation from all that enslaves the human race.

Baptismal second birth also incorporates Christians into a new human family. That family goes by many names: the people of God, the household of faith, the body of Christ, the community of believers, the church. This body is a living, dynamic social organism and the neophyte's inclusion within it is almost pal-

pable. The words and images associated with the incorporative aspect of baptism heighten this sense of almost tangible union.

There is a marvelous phrase embedded in the invitation to a final thanksgiving at the conclusion of the baptism service in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer: "Seeing . . . that these Persons are regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's Church."⁵ It is unfortunate that the horticultural figure of grafting did not survive prayer book revision, because it beautifully illuminates the concept of incorporation. Those who are reborn through baptism come into union with Christ, and in the same action are joined to the church, Christ's living body. In this grafting process, a wonderful mutuality is initiated. The new twigs bring their unique qualities to the tree and, at the same time, these fragile and tender branches are nourished through the other limbs and leaves of the tree and the trunk and root system which supports them all. The hybrid is stronger and more productive than any one of its parts or the sum of them was before. It is this incorporative or grafting aspect of baptism that nurtures young Christians so that they may grow strong in the faith and serve others in the world.

The great symbol of incorporation is naming. In the course of the baptismal rite the candidate is mentioned by name three times, at the presentation, at the immersion or infusion of water, and at the sealing. The naming is crucial because it is the sign of one's uniqueness and identity as a human being. In earlier times and in other places, names have been given because they are descriptive of the person or represent an aspiration held for an individual. (Adam means "man"; Sarah means "princess.") In our culture today, names are usually chosen with other purposes in mind: to carry on a family tradition, perhaps, or to be clever or unique, or just because one likes the way the word sounds. Still, parents tend to give considerable thought to the naming of a child because they know at some elemental level of their being that the name is an extension of the child's personhood.

When the church joins forces with the nuclear family in naming the new Christian, it is saluting that person's individuality at the moment of second birth. Some older candidates take new names at baptism to signal the turnaround that is occurring in their lives. Others retain their birth name as a sign of continuity, knowing

that the old identity is worth having because it has truly been made new. Incorporation into the household of faith is as important a rite of passage as physical birth. We know that is so, because it, too, is a time of giving or taking names.

The fact that the church takes incorporation seriously is manifest throughout the service of baptism. Godparents promise that the children they sponsor will be brought up within the context of Christian faith and life and will have a chance to grow into their full potential. The congregation which invites the candidates into its midst, promises to support their spiritual growth, prays that they may continue in the faith and communion of the church, and, at the end, welcomes them with one heart and voice into the household of God. Incorporation moves beyond symbol to the embracing and guiding actions of a caring community, which itself continues to exist only as the result of a chain reaction of incorporation that spans the centuries. It is fitting that a concluding sign of incorporation into the welcoming community is the exchange of the peace, which for those who are least inhibited may literally involve an enfolding embrace.

An ancient but subsidiary theme in baptism is illumination or enlightenment. In Rome in the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr described baptism in this way:

This washing is called enlightenment, because those that are experiencing these things have their minds enlightened. And he that is being enlightened is washed [*or, washes himself*] in the Name of Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the Name of the Holy Spirit, which through the prophets foretold all things concerning Jesus.⁶

This description calls to mind a number of biblical images. The evangelist John records the healing of the man born blind who, at Jesus' instruction, washed himself in the Pool of Siloam and came away with his sight restored.⁷ While that event is highly evocative of baptism, another New Testament incident is more directly baptismal. Saul of Tarsus, who was blinded by the presence of the Lord on the road to Damascus, had his sight restored three days later in an encounter with Ananias who laid hands on him and baptized him.⁸

Baptism is indeed the sacrament of illumination, but it would be a mistake to suggest that enlightenment comes as suddenly and dramatically for all Christians as John suggested in his gospel or Luke did in Acts or Justin Martyr did in Rome. Second birth inaugurates within Christian neophytes a new way of looking at and relating to the world. What happened to St. Paul in Damascus is symbolically prototypical of what happens to all Christians. Scales fall from their eyes; the world is seen in a new perspective. But the sharpening of Christian eyesight is a gradual process for most. It involves being part of the incorporating community which, through its pastoral, liturgical, and educational functions, nurtures, teaches, and forms the vision of the baptized.

In an essay in *Learning Through Liturgy*, cultural anthropologist Gwen Kennedy Neville makes the point that baptism is not an incorporating rite for candidates alone. It is also a time for the parents of an infant, especially a first child, to be "ceremonially transferred into the status of parents within the religious community."⁹ She goes on to suggest that baptism is a celebration for the entire faith community, even though every single member may not be present at the ceremony. "It is in this celebration that the network of ties connecting this infant to the world is extended outward from the individual to a social fabric of concerned coparticipants in a human community."¹⁰ While Neville's categories and language are those of a social scientist, the underlying religious reality to which she points is the fact that the rites of Christian initiation comprise a process through which people of faith are bound to God and one another in mutual responsibility and interdependence within the body of Christ.

Commissioning

Christians are reborn into a new relationship with God, the world, and one another. This second birth integrates them into a community whose purpose is to bring its members to spiritual maturity, which is a lifelong endeavor, and to prepare and support them for their ministry in the world. Baptism includes gestation, assimilation, *and* expulsion; genesis, incorporation, *and* exodus;

enlisting, training, *and* dispatching. This third element in the sequence of baptismal themes is what was discussed earlier as ordination to the church's primary order of ministry.

As with the other major baptismal themes, the concept of commissioning is interlaced throughout the initiatory rites, highlighting subsidiary motifs as it goes. At the end of the promises candidates or their sponsors pledge to follow and obey Christ—as he leads them onward and outward in the world. In the baptismal covenant, which is affirmed by all present, commitments are made and remade to resist evil, to proclaim the good news, to love and serve all God's people, and to work for justice, peace, and human dignity. These promises are undergirded by the prayers of the people who beseech God to teach the candidates “to love others in the power of the Spirit” and to “send them into the world in witness to [God's] love.”¹¹ Even the communal declaration of welcome, which is incorporative in nature, makes the transition from assimilation to sending by placing heavy emphasis on the fact that baptism is ordination to the priesthood of all believers:

We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.¹²

The great symbols of commissioning are the placing of a hand on the heads of the candidates and signation (signing with the sign of the cross) or, alternatively, chrismation (anointing with consecrated oil). These tactual actions mark the sealing and empowering of the new Christians for ministry.

Marion Hatchett notes that the laying-on-of-hands by the celebrant, either the bishop or a priest,

is associated in scripture and tradition with blessing, commissioning, identification, and transfer of powers. In Christian tradition it has been associated with the reconciliation of penitents, prayer for the sick, ordinations, and simple blessings as well as with baptismal rites.¹³

Given the comprehensive nature of the primary Christian sacrament, a number of these meanings are contained in the progression of conversion-inclusion-mission.

The roots of signation are planted deeply in the soil of both secular and religious history. Human beings have probably always branded their animals for purposes of identification. Slaves and soldiers were marked in a similar way in the ancient world. In the Jewish baptism of proselytes, the initiate was signed on the forehead with a Taw (T), the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet which represented the name of God, setting him apart as God's sheep, slave, soldier. Christian baptism continued the Jewish practice, translating the Taw into the sign of the cross and seeing the new Christian as the bondservant of Christ. Those who are sealed in baptism with the sign of the cross are not merely possessions of the Lord; they are those who do his will, who carry out his work, who act in his behalf. Christians are not only incorporated into Christ's household; they are also commissioned to undertake assignments in his behalf.

Chrismation, which is offered as an alternative sign of being sealed by the Holy Spirit, is an ancient practice with a cluster of meanings. The significance of anointing reaches deeply into history. In the middle east of biblical times scented oils were used as an emollient after bathing, as a sign of festivity on other occasions, as a medicinal balm, and as a final act of preparation of bodies for burial. In cultic practice, oil was used to consecrate objects or persons for religious purposes. Kings were anointed as a sign of transmission of power and authority, and in theocratic societies the anointed king became the vassal of the Lord. The various meanings that have accrued to the use of chrism (olive oil and balsam) make it a rich and powerful symbol. Because consecrated oil is connected with the setting apart of persons for special vocations (in some traditions it is used in the ordination of priests and bishops), it may be the symbol par excellence for ordination to the basic order of ministry, the *laos*.

Inaugurated Eschatology

The interwoven themes of baptism reveal Christian initiation to be an extended sequential process which begins with conversion, moves on to incorporation, and issues in commissioned service in behalf of Christ and the world. The missionary exodus

proceeding from baptism is open-ended; no destination is clearly in sight; boundaries are absent; the time-frame is uncertain.

The incalculable, future-oriented nature of Christian initiation has led an English liturgical study group to describe baptism as "a sacrament of inaugurated eschatology."¹⁴ Eschatology is that segment of systematic theology which deals with the final destiny of the individual soul and of humanity in general. The eschatological dimension of baptism is retrospective as well as prospective. It points us backward to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through which the redemption of fallen creation is accomplished, the beginning of the end, so to speak. It also points us forward toward the unpredictable *eschaton*, the *parousia*, the final fulfillment of the drama of redemption at the end of time.

Every baptism is a microcosmic example of the macrocosmic events that have radically changed the nature of God's relationship to creation and to human beings who have been given responsibility to master and manage the world. As the process of redemption has been begun and will be completed at an unknown moment in the future, so does baptism mark the beginning of a journey rather than a miraculous and finished transformation. More is started in baptism than is accomplished at the moment. The requisite qualities of the baptized, therefore, are openness, expectation, the desire to grow, and the ability to trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The words of the baptismal liturgy illustrate its eschatological character. The collect that concludes the little litany for the candidates summarizes the thematic progression of the rite, ending on a strong eschatological note.

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and for ever. *Amen*.¹⁵

The thanksgiving over the water is lightly salted with similar references, climaxing with the petition that those being baptized "may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior."¹⁶

The great symbols of the eschatological aspect of baptism are not as evident as the other signs, largely because they are most often consigned conceptually and liturgically to a separate sacramental compartment. The appropriate eschatological symbols are bread and wine.

Like baptism, the eucharist involves *anamnesis*, bringing past action into the present moment, and eschatological projection, bringing future meaning into the instant situation. As one of the eucharistic acclamations puts it,

We remember his death, [*anamnesis*]
 We proclaim his resurrection, [present action]
 We await his coming in glory. [eschatological expectation]¹⁷

The eucharist calls into the present the final passover meal that Jesus had with his disciples; it is the family meal that sustains the contemporary Christian household; it is also a foretaste of the messianic banquet to come, the great symbolic feast at which the faithful of all ages will gather with their Lord at the *parousia*. Jesus himself made the eschatological connection. In Matthew's version of the last supper we read,

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."¹⁸

Similar accounts are found in the other synoptic gospels.¹⁹

The introductory instructions in the baptismal rite state that it is appropriate for every baptism to be set within the context of the eucharist. It is, in fact, essential if the progressive themes of baptism are to have their full impact. The culminating eschatological element of the sacrament is considerably weakened without the symbolic underpinnings of bread and wine. It was argued earlier that full initiation into the church involves water baptism, sealing with the Holy Spirit, and admission to communion. This analysis

of the interlocking themes of baptism provides further theological reenforcement to that fundamental position.

The major themes of the initiatory rite are extraordinarily similar to the basic pattern of human development: birth; growth toward maturity within a social context; engagement in meaningful, contributory work; and movement into an unclear but promising future. These parallels are what make baptism such a potent sacrament; and they may help us see why it is so important that Christian initiation be well understood, interpreted, and administered.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Service of Holy Baptism

THIS chapter takes the reader on a guided tour through the baptismal rite in the Book of Common Prayer. The text of the prayer book service is printed on even numbered pages. On the facing pages to the right is a brief commentary arranged in three columns, dealing respectively with the *words* of the service, the *actions* that take place to undergird or enliven the words, and the classical *symbols* associated with baptism. Each comment is keyed to the appropriate section of the service through the use of numbers in the far left-hand margin. The most orderly and helpful way to work through this chapter is to read the text of the service, referring to the pertinent part of the commentary as the marginal numbers appear in order at the far left.

The aim of this journey through the service is to round out our understanding of the sacrament by paying attention to key points in the text and attendant ceremonial. In no sense is this chapter intended to be a set of directions on how to do the service. The Prayer Book rubrics themselves give the essential instructions. Custom and taste in each congregation will determine how the basic service may be simplified or enriched. Any extra-rubrical suggestions given here are meant to illuminate fundamental meanings and stimulate the imagination of the reader.

An excellent companion guide on this trek is the section on Holy Baptism in Marion Hatchett's *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, especially pages 267 to 288. This important book provides useful historical information and traces the liturgical perambulations of key parts of the text which need not be repeated in the material that follows.

Concerning the Service

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into

- [1] Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the

- [2] chief service on a Sunday or other feast.

The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the

- [3] Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist. At Baptism, the bishop officiates at the Presentation and Examination of the Candidates; says the Thanksgiving over the Water; [consecrates the Chrism;] reads the prayer, "Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit;" and officiates at what follows.

In the absence of a bishop, a priest is the celebrant and presides at the service. If a priest uses Chrism in signing the newly baptized, it must have been previously consecrated by the bishop.

- [4] Each candidate for Holy Baptism is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons.

Sponsors of adults and older children present their candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of the candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.

It is fitting that parents be included among the godparents of their own children. Parents and godparents are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church.

Additional Directions are on page 312.

WORDS

[1] *The nature of baptism* as non-repeatable full initiation has been thoroughly discussed in a previous chapter (pp. 32–36). As one moves through the service, it will become increasingly apparent how the rite as presently designed undergirds the concept of complete inclusion.

ACTIONS

[2] *The appropriate times and locations* for the administration of the sacrament have been covered previously (pp. 39–41).

[4] *Sponsors* have different functions, depending on the ages of the candidates. The presence of sponsors at the service is only part of their function. They are expected to help guide the new Christians as they are incorporated into the church which, in the case of infants or young children, may take many years. In order to exercise their responsibility effectively, sponsors themselves need to be well trained. The education of sponsors, therefore, should be part of the ongoing educational efforts of local congregations. Not only should parents and godparents of children be included in training programs, as the directions require, but the sponsors of adults as well.

SYMBOLS

[3] *The chief minister* of baptism is always the bishop when he is present. As a symbol of the universal church, the bishop reminds us that baptism is entry into a worldwide fellowship of Christians. As the ordaining minister of the church, the bishop's authority here reminds us that baptism is ordination to the primary order of ministry. Some parishes reserve all baptisms until the bishop visits, an appropriate but sometimes inconvenient practice. In the bishop's absence, the priest acts as his deputy.

Holy Baptism

[1]

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

[2] *The people standing, the Celebrant says*

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.

In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Celebrant Alleluia. Christ is risen.

People The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In Lent and on other penitential occasions

Celebrant Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins;

People His mercy endures for ever.

The Celebrant then continues

[3] There is one Body and one Spirit;
People There is one hope in God's call to us;
Celebrant One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
People One God and Father of all.

[4]

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us pray.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[2] *The opening acclamations* of Holy Baptism are the same as those which begin the Holy Eucharist, giving the two sacraments of the gospel similar shape and equal weight. This congruous beginning hints that the eucharist is to follow.

[3] *Special baptismal versicles and responses* stress the universal power and authority of God, the intended unity of his people in faith and order, and the all-inclusive, indissoluble nature of baptism.

[4] The suggestion that the *Gloria in excelsis* may be sung following the baptismal versicles and responses further identifies the structure of baptism with that of the eucharist. (BCP, p. 312, paragraph 5.)

[1] *The place* of the opening part of the service is not indicated. Since the intention is that baptism be administered in the church on Sunday morning, the initial segment of the liturgy should be located where the service of the word in the eucharist is normally done. Such placement strengthens the connections between the two sacraments.

[1] **The Collect of the Day**

People Amen.

At the principal service on a Sunday or other feast, the Collect and Lessons are properly those of the Day. On other occasions they are selected from "At Baptism." (See Additional Directions, page 312.)

[1] **The Lessons**

The people sit. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read,

[2] *the Reader first saying*

A Reading (Lesson) from _____.

A citation giving chapter and verse may be added.

After each Reading, the Reader may say

The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

or the Reader may say Here ends the Reading (Epistle).

Silence may follow.

A Psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each Reading.

[3] *Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying*

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to _____.

People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.

People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The collect and lessons* are normally selected from those appointed for the day. This is desirable so that baptism follows the regular rhythm of the church year. The major baptismal days (BCP, p. 312, paragraph 1) have lectionary readings that include the major themes of the sacrament. It may be useful on occasion to select one or more special lections for baptism (BCP, p. 928) for homiletical or teaching purposes.

[2] *Readers of the lessons* and leaders of the psalms should be selected from among lay members of the congregation. The service of ordination to the church's basic order of ministry should involve the members of that order as fully as possible. This is also an opportunity to use catechists, sponsors, or parents to demonstrate liturgically their teaching and guiding functions.

[3] *The reading of the gospel* is traditionally reserved to the order of deacon. When it is possible to follow this custom, the diversity of the ministry is further demonstrated. If no deacon is present, a priest reads the gospel.

[1] **The Sermon**

Or the Sermon may be preached after the Peace.

[2]

Presentation and Examination of the Candidates

The Celebrant says

- [3] The Candidate(s) for Holy Baptism will now be presented.

Adults and Older Children

The candidates who are able to answer for themselves are presented individually by their Sponsors, as follows

- [4] Sponsor I present N. to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

The Celebrant asks each candidate when presented

Do you desire to be baptized?

Candidate I do.

Infants and Younger Children

Then the candidates unable to answer for themselves are presented individually by their Parents and Godparents, as follows

Parents and Godparents

- [4] I present N. to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[3] Candidate comes from the Latin word *candidatus*, meaning clothed in white. Candidates for public office in ancient Rome wore white togas as identifying signs. Christians adopted the term and used white garments (called *chrysom*) to clothe the naked, now-pure new members as they emerged from the waters of baptism.

[1] The sermon may be preached here or after the peace. Sometimes there is a tendency to postpone the sermon for practical reasons. Adult sermons can be long and abstract, causing restlessness among candidates and sponsors who await the baptism for which they have carefully prepared. Since the interpretation of the Word of God best follows hard on its reading, a short homily at this point is most appropriate. This is also an excellent opportunity for a homily directed at children who may be invited forward to gather round the preacher.

[2] A *procession to the font* may take place here, with small children leading the way so that they may see. Depending on the distance to be traveled, hymns or psalms may be sung. If the font is located in a place so awkward as to diminish a sense of corporate participation by the whole congregation, movement to the font may be done later, just before or during the prayers for the candidates.

[4] *The names* of the candidates are announced by the sponsors for the first time in the service, signifying the unique identity of each person being presented. (See pp. 47–48 above.)

When all have been presented the Celebrant asks the parents and godparents

- [1] Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?

Parents and Godparents

I will, with God's help.

Celebrant

- [1] Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?

Parents and Godparents

I will, with God's help.

Then the Celebrant asks the following questions of the candidates who can speak for themselves, and of the parents and godparents who speak on behalf of the infants and younger children

- | | | | |
|-----|---|----------|---|
| [2] | { | Question | Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? |
| | | Answer | I renounce them. |
| | { | Question | Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? |
| | | Answer | I renounce them. |
| | { | Question | Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? |
| | | Answer | I renounce them. |
| [3] | { | Question | Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? |
| | | Answer | I do. |
| [4] | { | Question | Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? |
| | | Answer | I do. |

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The responsibilities of parents and godparents* are delineated by two deceptively simple questions and answers. The promise to see that the child is brought up as a believing, practicing Christian is a much more complex commitment than the rather mechanistic promise it replaces from earlier rites—that the child be taught the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. The companion promise to help the child's development through prayer and example requires sponsors to look to their own spiritual health as well as that of the child. The two promises are good examples of the expectation that Christian families will nurture their members spiritually, as well as physically.

[2] *The threefold renunciations* use dramatic language to indicate that the candidates stand squarely against whatever is evil and destructive. The traditional terminology of the renunciations may seem anachronistic to some people today. However, most human beings are aware of unseen negative forces, corrupt and destructive powers, and unwholesome desires at work in their personal lives or social situations. Prebaptismal instruction should get at the meanings of the renunciations through the personal experiences of the candidates and sponsors.

[4] *The threefold professions of faith* commit the candidates to orient their lives toward Christ the Lord and Savior. In some ancient liturgies the candidates made their renunciations facing west, turning east (orientation, literally) to make their professions of faith. That kind of expressive action is strongly invited by the first question in the professions: "Do you turn to Jesus Christ . . ."

[3] *Wicked spiritual forces, evil powers, and sinful desires* can be seen as less abstract and more concrete by the use of a simple device during the period of preparation. Adult candidates and parents of infant candidates may be asked to write down the negative forces and desires they see in the world and in their personal lives that they wish to stand against. These lists may be brought to the baptism and destroyed by some act, such as shredding or trampling under foot.

Question Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Answer I do.

[1] *When there are others to be presented, the Bishop says*

The other Candidate(s) will now be presented.

Presenters I present *these persons* for Confirmation.

or I present *these persons* to be received into this Communion.

or I present *these persons* who *desire* to reaffirm *their* baptismal vows.

The Bishop asks the candidates

Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?

Candidate I do.

Bishop

Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

Candidate

I do, and with God's grace I will follow him as my Savior and Lord.

After all have been presented, the Celebrant addresses the congregation, saying

[2] Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support *these persons* in *their* life in Christ?

People We will.

The Celebrant then says these or similar words

[3] Let us join with *those* who *are* committing *themselves* to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[2] *The responsibilities of the congregation* match and extend the vows made earlier by adult candidates and the parents and godparents of children. An adult is usually expected to look after himself, perhaps with the help of his own personal support system. The nuclear family is generally regarded as having the central role in shaping the spiritual development of an infant. The assumption of baptism, however, is that the local congregation can and should influence the growth of new Christians. The corporate household of faith can assist drifting or disoriented members, preventing them from going off on odd tangents. It can enrich neophytes and their families with the wisdom and experience of a large and diverse body.

[3] *The invitation to the renewal of the baptismal covenant* serves as a reminder to members of the congregation that they, like parents and sponsors, have a responsibility to perfect their own lives in order to be good examples to those for whom they have just taken responsibility.

[1] When the bishop is present *other candidates* may come forward for confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation. Their participation in the same service with candidates for baptism carries an important message to everyone involved: There will be times later on in the development of those being initiated when they will want to reassess their commitments and renew their baptismal promises. The clear signal being given is that baptism is the beginning of a journey, not an end in itself. Every effort should be made liturgically—and educationally—to reinforce the connection between initiation and renewal.

The Baptismal Covenant

- [1] *Celebrant* Do you believe in God the Father?
People I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
- Celebrant* Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
People I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- Celebrant* Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?
People I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
- [2] *Celebrant* Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and
fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the
prayers?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever
you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
People I will, with God's help.

WORDS	ACTIONS	SYMBOLS
<p>[2] <i>The life and mission of the baptizing community</i> is outlined in the questions and answers that follow the creed. The internal life of the church is summed up in the formula from Acts 2:42. This is followed by declarations dealing with the moral, missionary, and social responsibilities of the church. One of the healthiest additions in the present Prayer Book is the expansion of the baptismal horizon beyond personal piety and individual salvation to include responsibility for evangelizing others and working for justice, human dignity, and peace.</p>	<p>[1] <i>The baptismal covenant</i> begins with a recitation of the Apostles' Creed, the ancient baptismal creed, in the manner of the early church. In primitive liturgies the candidate was immersed after affirming each article of the trinitarian expression of faith. That ancient threefold action is recalled here only verbally. Even though the baptism takes place within the framework of the eucharist, the Nicene Creed is omitted in favor of the baptismal creed.</p>	

- Celebrant* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
People I will, with God's help.

[1] **Prayers for the Candidates**

The Celebrant then says to the congregation

Let us now pray for *these persons* who *are* to receive the Sacrament of new birth[and for those (this person) who *have renewed their* commitment to Christ.]

[2] *A Person appointed leads the following petitions*

- Leader* Deliver *them*, O Lord, from the way of sin and death.
People Lord, hear our prayer.
- Leader* Open *their hearts* to your grace and truth.
People Lord, hear our prayer.
- Leader* Fill *them* with your holy and life-giving Spirit.
People Lord, hear our prayer.
- Leader* Keep *them* in the faith and communion of your holy Church.
People Lord, hear our prayer.
- Leader* Teach *them* to love others in the power of the Spirit.
People Lord, hear our prayer.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The prayers for the candidates* undergird the promises made by both candidates and sponsors by submitting their good intentions to the perfecting, activating power of God. The sponsors and the congregation here take an immediate first step in making good their vows to assist and support the candidates. Turning to the primary and essential resource of prayer is the appropriate place to begin. Note that the petitions reflect the major baptismal themes, the first three having to do with the death/resurrection experience of conversion, the fourth and fifth with incorporation, the fifth and sixth with mission/ministry, and the last with inaugurated eschatology.

[2] *The leader of the prayers*, as the rubric indicates, may be any suitable person. This is an ideal place to demonstrate further the diversity of ministers who participate in the rite by having a lay person, perhaps one of the sponsors, read the petitions.

Leader Send *them* into the world in witness to your love.
People Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader Bring *them* to the fullness of your peace and glory.
People Lord, hear our prayer.

The Celebrant says

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and for ever. *Amen.*

[1] **Thanksgiving over the Water**

[2] *The Celebrant blesses the water, first saying*

[3] The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Celebrant

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.
Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.
Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The thanksgiving over the water* encompasses one of the most fertile and effective new prayers in the 1979 revision of the Prayer Book. It touches on the symbolic place of water in Judeo-Christian history and deftly aligns that heritage with the baptism presently taking place. The four major themes of the sacrament are woven into this masterful baptismal tapestry. In substance and drama this climactic prayer parallels the prayer of consecration in the eucharistic rite.

[3] In the early church, when baptisms were done by total immersion in natural bodies of water or large pools constructed for the purpose, no special action was needed to demonstrate the elemental significance and potency of water. Some churches have retained the primitive manner of baptism; others are restoring the practice of immersion. Where affusion (pouring) or sprinkling is practiced, attention must be paid to *the filling of the font*. Water should be poured into the font with sufficient animation and visibility to exhibit its power and importance. Holding a ewer or pitcher high while pouring, will permit the falling water to be seen by all and the splashing which results to be heard—and felt—by those close at hand. The pouring normally takes place just before the words “The Lord be with you” which introduce the blessing of the water.

[2] *Water* was regarded by earlier civilizations as one of the four basic elements in the universe. It still carries tremendous symbolic freight for human beings today. We know that water has the capacity to cleanse, refresh, relax, and protect (as in the amniotic fluid that surrounds a fetus); it also has the power to kill. Without water we would die; by it we may die. As Hatchett points out, the baptismal prayer of thanksgiving and blessing “portrays the font, in the classical manner, as a bath, a womb, and a tomb. Prayer is made that those baptized may be cleansed, reborn, and buried and resurrected in Jesus Christ.”¹

fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

At the following words, the Celebrant touches the water

Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.

To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Consecration of the Chrism

- [3] *The Bishop may then consecrate oil of Chrism, placing a hand on the vessel of oil, and saying*

Eternal Father, whose blessed Son was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Savior and servant of all, we pray you to consecrate this oil, that those who are sealed with it may share in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Baptism

- [2] *Each candidate is presented by name to the Celebrant, or to an assisting priest or deacon, who then immerses, or pours water upon, the candidate, saying*
- [4] N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The oil of chrism*, signifying ordination to the priesthood of all believers, is consecrated with a blessing whose words make several crucial points. (a) Ecclesial priesthood is derived from and dependent upon the priesthood of the Anointed One, *Christos* in Greek, Christ in English. (b) Anointing is linked to the imparting of the Holy Spirit, a connection that will be made again at the time of the sealing. (c) Priesthood is essentially a ministry of servanthood, rather than one of privilege and prestige.

[2] The prebaptismal rubric indicates that immersion is the *preferred method of baptism*. That is not the current practice in most parishes. But the imagery involved in the suggested practice is so central that it should be listed as the first option and so noted in all preliminary instruction. Though not mentioned in the rubrics, the prevalent custom of pouring water over the candidate three times as the triune name of God is spoken is a remnant of the threefold creedal immersion of early Christian practice.

Three predominant symbols of baptism are clustered together at this point in the liturgy: the bishop, the oil of chrism (see column one), and the candidate's name.

[3] The significance of *the bishop's symbolic role* has been discussed earlier. Even when he is not physically present at a baptism, a sign of his participation is recalled by the chrism, which the bishop alone is authorized to consecrate, and by the priest who has been ordained by the bishop and delegated to baptize in the bishop's absence.

[4] *The name of the candidate*, as mentioned before, is a sign of the incorporation of a unique individual into the community of faith. Generally, the so-called Christian names, but not the surname, are used at this point.

- [1] [2] *When this action has been completed for all candidates, the Bishop or Priest, at a place in full sight of the congregation, prays over them, saying*
Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your *servants* the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.*

- [4] *Then the Bishop or Priest places a hand on the person's head, marking on the forehead the sign of the cross [using Chrism if desired] and saying to each one*

- [3] *N., you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.*

Or this action may be done immediately after the administration of the water and before the preceding prayer.

When all have been baptized, the Celebrant says

Let us welcome the newly baptized.

Celebrant and People

We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.

If Confirmation, Reception, or the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is not to follow, the Peace is now exchanged

- [5] *Celebrant* The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[3] *Sealing, signation, or chrismation* is the second of the three major stages in baptism as full initiation. This may take place near the font or, if it would help the congregation to see and participate better, at the front of the church. A psalm or hymn may be sung during a procession to the chancel. The sealing is introduced by (or, as the rubric permits, followed by) the prayer of thanksgiving said over the candidates.

[4] *The use of chrism* at this point has considerable meaning in all of the ways that have previously been mentioned.

[5] Ample time should be given for *the peace*, so that the officiating ministers and nearby members of the congregation may greet the new Christians and their sponsors as an indication of incorporation.

[1] Immediately following the administration of the water, the new Christians may be clothed with white garments (chrysom), recalling the practice of the early church, representing the new life in Christ with which the candidates have been attired. A shawl, long scarf, or blanket would be adequate.

[2] In many churches the paschal candle is placed near the font as a reminder of the link between every baptism and Christ's *baptisma*, the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. It is a fitting gesture to present the candidate (or the parents or sponsors of an infant) with a small candle ignited from the paschal candle. The traditional place for this is immediately after the clothing with a white garment (if used), but it could be postponed until after the congregation's declaration of welcome. A number of meanings are obvious, not the least of which is the calling of each Christian to show forth the light of Christ.

At Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation

The Bishop says to the congregation

Let us now pray for *these persons* who *have* renewed *their* commitment to Christ.

Silence may be kept.

Then the Bishop says

- [1] Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in *these* your *servants* the covenant you made with *them* at *their* Baptism. Send *them* forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before *them*; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

For Confirmation

- [2] *The Bishop lays hands upon each one and says*

Strengthen, O Lord, your servant N. with your Holy Spirit; empower *him* for your service; and sustain *him* all the days of *his* life. *Amen.*

or this

Defend, O Lord, your servant N. with your heavenly grace, that *he* may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until *he* comes to your everlasting kingdom. *Amen.*

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] *The bishop's prayer* for those who have presented themselves for confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation stresses the point that this action is a renewal of their baptismal vows. The clear connotation is that their earlier baptism (including sealing) was full and complete initiation into Christ's body, the church, and that this renewal is to empower them for new occasions of service that lie ahead.

[2] Tactual action by the bishop is only indicated for those being confirmed. But most bishops probably use some appropriate sign for each type of renewal. To be consistent with the conviction that none of these forms of renewal is considered to be the completion of baptism (which is full initiation in its own right), the same tactual sign should be used throughout. Appropriately, that would be the laying on of hands which has been and is used in a variety of circumstances throughout the church.

For Reception

N., we recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you. *Amen.*

For Reaffirmation

N., may the Holy Spirit, who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom. *Amen.*

Then the Bishop says

Almighty and everliving God, let your fatherly hand ever be over *these* your *servants*; let your Holy Spirit ever be with *them*; and so lead *them* in the knowledge and obedience of your Word, that *they* may serve you in this life, and dwell with you in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Peace is then exchanged

<i>Bishop</i>	The peace of the Lord be always with you.
<i>People</i>	And also with you.

At the Eucharist

- [1] [2] *The service then continues with the Prayers of the People or the Offertory of the Eucharist, at which the Bishop, when present, should be the principal Celebrant.*

Except on Principal Feasts, the Proper Preface of Baptism may be used.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] The third major segment of baptism as complete initiation is admission to communion. Baptism, then, is properly set within the context of the *eucharist* and is brought to closure by it. Eucharistic Prayer D (BCP, p. 372 ff.) may be the most appropriate form to use. It matches the language of the baptismal service; it richly reflects the themes of baptism; and it provides for intercessions, obviating the need for a separate intercessory form which would extend an already crowded liturgy.

[2] The newly baptized, including infants, should *receive communion* to mark the completion of the threefold action of the rite. Parents may or may not wish to have their infants communicate regularly until somewhat later, but a crumb of bread and a drop of wine is easily and appropriately administered to them as an indication that they are full members of the Christian household.

[1] Alternative Ending

If there is no celebration of the Eucharist, the service continues with the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.	Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.
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[2] *The Celebrant then says*

All praise and thanks to you, most merciful Father, for adopting us as your own children, for incorporating us into your holy Church, and for making us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in light; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Alms may be received and presented, and other prayers may be added, concluding with this prayer

[3] Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, grant you to be strengthened with might by his Holy Spirit, that, Christ dwelling in your hearts by faith, you may be filled with all the fullness of God. *Amen.*

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[1] It is difficult to imagine circumstances under which baptism would be completed with the *alternative ending*, that is, without the eucharist. If for some unusual reason the curtailed service must be used, the newly baptized should participate in their first eucharist as soon thereafter as possible.

[2] *The prayer of thanksgiving* and [3] *the blessing* in the alternative ending lack a certain strength and completeness. While they pick up some of the themes of baptism, placing heavy emphasis on the familial, incorporative elements, they omit important references to the elements of death and resurrection and commissioning for ministry.

Additional Directions

- [1] Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions or when a bishop is present.

If on any one of the above-named days the ministry of a bishop or priest cannot be obtained, the bishop may specially authorize a deacon to preside. In that case, the deacon omits the prayer over the candidates, page 308, and the formula and action which follow.

These omitted portions of the rite may be administered on some subsequent occasion of public baptism at which a bishop or priest presides.

- [2] If on the four days listed above there are no candidates for Baptism, the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, page 292, may take the place of the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist.

If desired, the hymn *Gloria in excelsis* may be sung immediately after the opening versicles and before the salutation "The Lord be with you."

When a bishop is present, or on other occasions for sufficient reason, the Collect (page 203 or 254) and one or more of the Lessons provided for use at Baptism (page 928) may be substituted for the Proper of the Day.

Lay persons may act as readers, and it is appropriate for sponsors to be assigned this function. The petitions (page 305) may also be led by one of the sponsors.

The Nicene Creed is not used at this service.

- [3] If the Presentation of the Candidates does not take place at the font, then before or during the petitions (page 305), the ministers, candidates, and sponsors go to the font for the Thanksgiving over the Water.
- [3] If the movement to the font is a formal procession, a suitable psalm, such as Psalm 42, or a hymn or anthem, may be sung.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

Additional directions are given in an orderly fashion as they pertain to logistics, variations in the liturgy of the word, and details concerning the rest of the service. Many points raised here have been touched upon as we proceeded through the service itself.

[1] Baptisms should be reserved for the five traditional *baptismal days*. If the cycles of preparation outlined earlier in this study are taken seriously and followed, baptismal occasions would be narrowed to two or three times during the year, further enhancing the pivotal importance of the sacrament.

[2] However, the renewal of vows, as suggested by the fourth rubric, could be done on the other baptismal days to highlight their significance in the calendar.

[3] Both explicitly and implicitly the directions stress the importance of *visibility and movement*. All ministers, both lay and clerical, should be seen and heard clearly by the congregation to insure a corporate feeling to this most corporate of sacraments. As has been suggested throughout, movement from one setting to another can enhance the drama of the liturgy. The rubrics indicate when and how this can be done.

Where practicable, the font is to be filled with clean water immediately before the Thanksgiving over the Water.

- [1] At the Thanksgiving over the Water, and at the administration of Baptism, the celebrant, whenever possible, should face the people across the font, and the sponsors should be so grouped that the people may have a clear view of the action.

After the Baptism, a candle (which may be lighted from the Paschal Candle) may be given to each of the newly baptized or to a godparent.

- [1] It may be found desirable to return to the front of the church for the prayer, "Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit," and the ceremonies that follow it. A suitable psalm, such as Psalm 23, or a hymn or anthem, may be sung during the procession.

The oblations of bread and wine at the baptismal Eucharist may be presented by the newly baptized or their godparents.

[2] Conditional Baptism

If there is reasonable doubt that a person has been baptized with water, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (which are the essential parts of Baptism), the person is baptized in the usual manner, but this form of words is used

If you are not already baptized, N., I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[3] Emergency Baptism

In case of emergency, any baptized person may administer Baptism according to the following form.

Using the given name of the one to be baptized (if known), pour water on him or her, saying

I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

WORDS

ACTIONS

SYMBOLS

[2] *The form for conditional baptism may not be* used very often, but its provision in the Prayer Book is worthy of note. It reminds us that baptism is meant to happen only once in a person's lifetime; it is a nonrepeatable sacrament. The conditional form is used only when there is uncertainty about one's baptism through the failure of memory or the absence of records.

[1] *Additional directions* having to do with movement in the service tie in with the actions noted in [3] on the preceding pair of pages.

[3] The provision for *emergency baptism* raises several points pertinent to this study. (a) Baptism is so basic and crucial a sacrament that it may, in the final analysis, be administered by any baptized person. (b) Since baptism is not magic, it should be administered *in extremis* only when a clear desire for baptism has been expressed by the person being baptized or the parents of a dying baby. (c) Because baptism is the beginning of one's life in the church, the act should be registered in a specific parish and, if the new Christian recovers from his illness or injury, the baptism should be acknowledged in a public service, as the rubrics recommend. Ample follow-up instruction and pastoral care should be extended so that the neophyte may be incorporated into the church as sensitively and creatively as possible.

The Lord's Prayer is then said.

Other prayers, such as the following, may be added

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon this your servant the forgiveness of sin and have raised *him* to the new life of grace. Strengthen *him*, O Lord, with your presence, enfold *him* in the arms of your mercy, and keep *him* safe for ever.

The person who administers emergency Baptism should inform the priest of the appropriate parish, so that the fact can be properly registered.

If the baptized person recovers, the Baptism should be recognized at a public celebration of the Sacrament with a bishop or priest presiding, and the person baptized under emergency conditions, together with the sponsors or godparents, taking part in everything except the administration of the water.

Confessional churches, like the Presbyterian and the Lutheran, tend to identify themselves by adherence to hard fought and intricately written statements of belief, such as the Westminster or Augsburg Confessions, respectively. Hierarchical churches, like the Roman Catholic and Methodist, tend to rely on the glue of structure and law to hold them together. Other churches, like the Anglican, tend to follow the dictates of *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

That ancient Christian maxim, literally translated, means "the law of prayer, the law of belief." Freely but faithfully interpreted, it means the way we pray reveals what we actually believe. "If you want to know what we believe," Anglicans would say, "read our Prayer Book. Better yet, come and worship with us for a while." It may well be that *lex orandi, lex credendi* is more revealing of what other communions really believe than confessions or canon law.

This chapter has been one small demonstration of how theology is reflected in liturgy, specifically in the baptismal liturgy. We have seen how words, actions, and symbols have to be viewed together in order to see the whole picture. Words without actions may be sterile; actions or symbols without words may be elusive. The interrelatedness of our three categories sometimes made it difficult to know which column to use for certain elements. But in the end all three aspects worked together in a wonderful way to illuminate baptism as complete initiation into the Body of Christ.

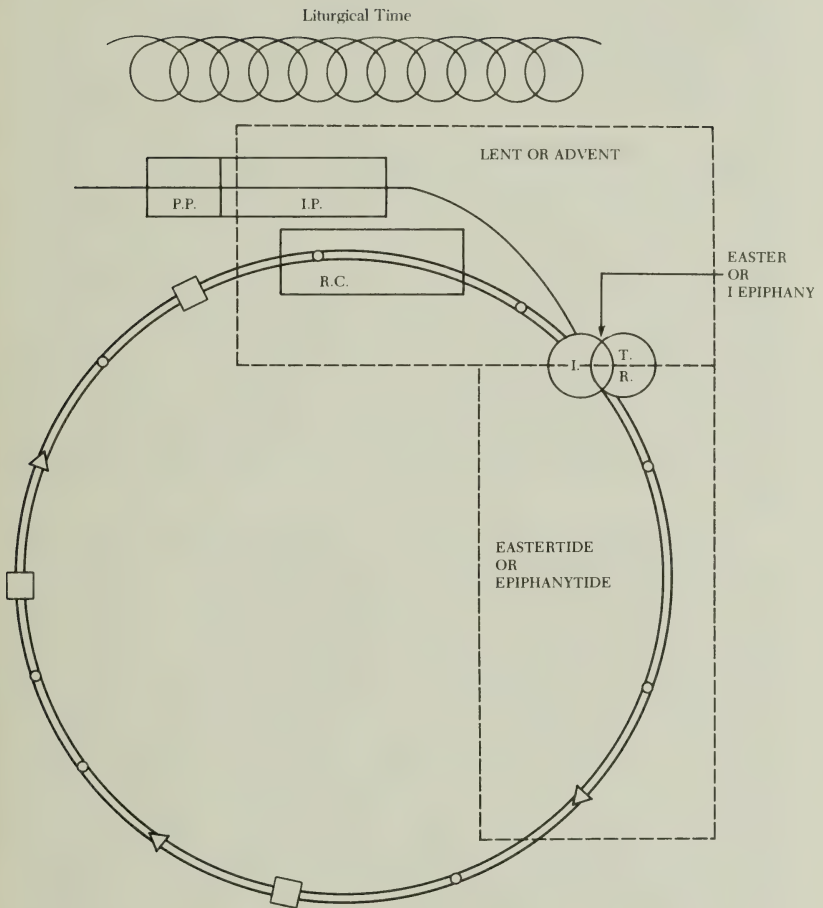
CHAPTER SIX

Preparing for Baptism

IN developing a thoroughgoing program of preparation for complete Christian initiation through baptism, one fact must be acknowledged and dealt with realistically: two quite different categories of persons are presented to receive the sacrament. There are infants and young children who are brought forward by their parents or guardians, and there are older children and adults who, in essence, present themselves.

Although some historians and liturgiologists insist that adult baptism is the norm for the Christian church, the probability is that most of the candidates in most of the churches of the western world are infants. Any plan of preparation must take that circumstance seriously. It must also take into account the fact that since 1977 the number of adults baptized in the Episcopal Church has risen dramatically. *The Book of Occasional Services* recently authorized by the Episcopal Church has an extensive and helpful section on the adult catechumenate¹ but, unfortunately, nothing specifically designed for the preparation of infants.

The purpose of this section is to suggest a common approach to preparation which takes into account both historical precedents and contemporary realities and can be adapted to the needs of parents and sponsors of infants as well as older candidates and their sponsors. In outlining this approach I will make some comments on the problem of terminology, discuss the need to recover the venerable office of catechist, identify five stages in the initiatory process, and describe how those stages can be appropriately developed for both kinds of candidates.



- P.P. Preliminary Preparation (Pre-Catechumenate)
 Inquiry: Exploring Expectations and Requirements
 I.P. Intensive Preparation (Catechumenate)
 I. Full Initiation (Baptism-Sealing-Eucharist)
 T.R. Turning-Point Renewal (Confirmation, Reception, Reaffirmation)
 □ Periodic Renewal (Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, I Epiphany)
 ○ Regular Eucharistic Renewal
 ◀ Continuing Education and Spiritual Formation
 R.C. Review Catechesis (Courses in Basic Christianity)
 — Individual Track
 = Community Track

First, a word about language and concepts. The extensive work of Roman Catholics and others on the reformation of Christian initiation has rightly rooted itself in the practices of the early church. That effort has been very helpful in establishing benchmarks for understanding and administering baptism today. Along with historical insights, however, have come a lot of primitive procedures, perceptions, and terminology that may have been adopted too readily and too completely. The Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and other approaches that parallel or derive from it seem overly elaborate and unnecessarily confusing. The procedures suggested in *The Book of Occasional Services* are simpler but may still seem so alien that many will avoid using them. In a time of liturgical and sacramental transition it is important to avoid excessively intricate patterns and abstruse jargon while retaining the essential theological elements and basic flow of the initiation process. It is less important to master a new set of words—or be blocked by them—than it is to develop a process of preparation that makes sense locally so that people will use it.

In what follows, certain words and concepts that are part of the current conversations about Christian initiation have been avoided (e.g., *mystagogia*, the elect, enlightenment). Since they are not a part of the vocabulary of most modern Christians, their meanings are obscure or confusing. A limited number of technical words have been retained because they are more commonly part of current usage. These terms also happen to be interrelated, hence more readily understandable. They are catechesis, catechumen, and catechist. All three come from the Greek word *katachein*, to teach. Catechesis is instruction, especially that undertaken with those who are preparing for baptism. A catechumen is a person under instruction, also referred to as a candidate. A catechist is a teacher, especially of people preparing for baptism.

Every Christian has been a catechumen and has participated in catechesis, although those particular words may not have been used at the time. Many Christians have engaged in various kinds of teaching in the church, though only a few may have prepared others for baptism. Hardly any would describe themselves as ca-

techists. Yet the office of catechist has been an important one in the history of Christianity, not only in its earliest days but also in parts of the contemporary church where there is a scarcity of clergy. In Africa and Asia lay catechists are often the principle agents of primary evangelism. With the recovery of the centrality of baptism, the office of catechist is ready to be reintroduced to the western church.

Those congregations that begin to take preparation for baptism seriously will find that longer periods of instruction and follow-up with catechumens require more intense involvement and supervision. Parish clergy, trying to cover many fronts, may not have the time to do an adequate job by themselves. Others will have to be trained to assist or, preferably, take charge. These trained teachers should logically assume the venerable and descriptive title of catechist. Here is an exciting way of broadening the ministry of the *laos* within the local parish and utilizing the talent and commitment of people who may be called to a pastoral and teaching vocation but have no desire to be professional clergy.

A creative process of preparation, in which congregations, candidates, sponsors, catechists, and clergy all work together, includes these five stages: inquiry, instruction, initiation, integration, and—almost certainly—ingemination.

The period of *inquiry* may come in response to the active evangelism or recruitment programs of a congregation. It may spring from the restless initiative of a person who begins to raise questions and risks asking them in a particular Christian community. What is crucial in this stage is not only the presence of a seeker but the existence of a sensitive community in which the seeking may be done, perhaps rather gingerly at first. Some carefully thought-out structures are needed to help the process get started. This stage is what *The Book of Occasional Services* calls “the pre-catechumenal period”² and what the diagram on page 91 calls preliminary preparation. At some point in this phase the inquirer decides to stand pat, go farther, or drop out.

The stage of *instruction* involves entering into a formal program of training or teaching (catechesis), leading toward baptism. This period should be long enough for the principals (catechumens and sponsors) to grasp the meaning of Christian initiation and to sense

the importance of the commitments about to be made. *The Book of Occasional Services* calls this period of intensive preparation "the catechumenate." In that book there is a service that may be used to mark an aspirant's entrance into this stage liturgically.³ Although this service is designed for adult catechumens, it can and should be adapted for use by the parents and sponsors of infant catechumens. Toward the end of the period of instruction, a decision is made whether or not to proceed with baptism.

The step of *initiation* is the threefold rite of complete incorporation into the Household of God, involving water baptism, sealing by the Holy Spirit, and admission to communion.

If the baptism takes place at Easter or on Epiphany I, the period of *integration* may be symbolized by the fifty days of Eastertide or the season of Epiphany. In actuality, of course, integration involves the gradual inclusion of the new Christian into the church over many months or years. During this time the neophytes reflect on what God has begun in them through baptism, work at their continuing education and spiritual formation, and develop and perfect their particular missions as Christian persons.

Ingemination is a stage that may occur once or twice or many times during the life of a Christian. The word means redoubling, repeating, or reiterating. Ingemination is what was referred to earlier as renewal. There are, as I have contended, many turning points in one's spiritual development. The pastoral and educational life of the church is meant to help a person prepare for those turning points so that he may be able to traverse them creatively and reiterate his or her baptismal commitment with new understanding and deeper faith. The liturgical expressions of ingemination are confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation. (See pp. 27-30 above.)

The Initiation of Infants and Small Children

Because most candidates for baptism are infants and small children, it is well to begin with the special concerns that surface in their preparation. The primary focus of the catechumenate for

this age group is, of course, the parents. In almost all cases it is the parents who take the initiative in bringing a child to baptism, though there may be insistent grandparents lurking somewhere in the background. Parents present their children for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are preoccupied with the external cultural and religious forms of baptism. Sometimes there are latent spiritual issues that surface at the birth of a new baby. If a first child is involved, the decision to baptize may signal the return of a lapsed young couple to the church. Sometimes one parent is more eager to have the child baptized than the other, raising potentially creative tensions within the intricate relationships of the family.

Whatever the motivational dynamics may be, the baptism of a small child is an important transition time for its parents. In all likelihood, the initiation process will be as important a spiritual experience for the parents as it will be for the child. The pastoral, educational, and missionary dimensions of baptism take considerable time to have their full effect on the child; for parents the consequences are more immediate and have an important bearing on how the child is nurtured in faith. Since the parents (along with godparents) will be making commitments for their child, they need to understand what the promises mean, which can lead them to review the substance of their own belief. Because godparents may well live in separate communities from their charges, it is the parents who bear the greatest responsibility for the child's spiritual welfare. All these factors must be taken into account and dealt with in the most imaginative way possible.

In paying attention to the crucial role of the parents, the perceptive capacities of the child must not be forgotten. Recent studies have found

that babies quickly develop the notion of "self"—of being different from other things in the world—which suggests that the brain may be prewired for this concept. And despite the widely held theory that language molds human thought, infants who cannot speak seem to grasp such abstract ideas as how to place objects into categories. These findings carry an important message for parents: since babies have incipient minds, they should be stimulated early.⁴

The senses of newborn infants are sharp enough to distinguish their mother's voice from another, to perceive different shapes and patterns, and to transfer information received by one sense to an entirely different sense. Because babies are apparently more "brainy" than was once imagined, their ability to "learn" about their baptism needs to be exploited. Every opportunity should be taken to enable the child to feel the significance of the event. Being held by the principal participants in advance is important. So is a visit to the place where the baptism will occur—at a time when it is being used for worship. So is tactual familiarity with the outward symbols such as water and chrism. Older small children should be encouraged to take part in preparatory discussions as they are able. Even a rehearsal for older wigglers may help them to be at ease and to grasp the importance of the event.

Inquiry. For infants and small children the stage of inquiry may be entered in various ways. For active members of a parish, the first approach to the parents may be made during pregnancy by a priest or catechist, followed by a visit to the hospital when the baby is born. There is an interesting precedent for this in the Anglican tradition. Jeremy Taylor, the great seventeenth-century British divine, was a strong supporter of infant baptism, though he rejected the Augustinian notion that unbaptized infants would be consigned to hell if they should die. He created a baptismal office reflecting his views which began with a prayer for the expectant mother. Taylor's office also contains a prayer for the newborn baby's protection which was, in effect, the infant's enrollment in the catechumenate.⁵

Later on, a home visit may be made to explore the parents' desires for the baptism of their child. They should be informed of the date of the next corporate baptism and urged to give ample notice to out-of-town grandparents and other relatives so they can save the date and make necessary travel plans. The parents should be encouraged to give thought to the choice of godparents and to be clear about the criteria for their selection. If they feel it important to invite nonpracticing Christians to participate, they could fill the role of "honorary" godparents. In cases where parents have difficulty finding suitable sponsors, the priest or catech-

ist should help them find members of the congregation who would be happy to serve. If a biannual cycle of Christian initiation is followed in the parish, a decision for baptism should be made in late Epiphany or Pentecost, so that intensive preparation may take place during Lent or Advent.

Nonmembers of a congregation or those who have been inactive for some years will themselves take the initiative to inquire about baptism. Some may be encouraged to take this step by people who are active members. It is helpful for a parish to have a written set of guidelines for baptism that can be sent as an immediate response to a telephone inquiry. This need not be an elaborate document, but it should deal with commonly raised questions and clearly state the baptismal standards of the congregation. A follow-up call may be made on the family during which a number of points should be covered. (a) Since participation in a Christian community is part of the baptismal commitment, the parish should be accurately described so the parents can sense whether or not they would be happy in it. (b) Since there is no theological reason to rush infants into baptism, unaffiliated parents should be encouraged to begin worshiping with the congregation regularly. (c) The requirements and content of prebaptism instruction should be briefly explained. (d) It should be made clear that a decision about baptism need not be made until the end of the instruction phase. If the start of a baptismal cycle is closer than three months away, the parents should plan for the baptism of their child in the succeeding cycle. The decision to enter instruction should be made no later than late Pentecost or Epiphany, at which time relatives may be alerted and the selection of godparents should be discussed and made.

For active and inactive parents alike, the inquiry period may conclude with a clear line of liturgical demarcation. *The Book of Occasional Services* proffers two separate rites to mark the transit of adult catechumens: admission and enrollment.⁶ This two-step approach may be too elaborate for the liturgical routine of an ordinary parish. A single rite of admission or enrollment—or a fusion of the two—may be more realistic. An adaptation of such a single rite may be used for the admission of parents and godparents to the period of instruction which will be focused largely on them.

Instruction. At a minimum the instruction phase should encompass four sessions of an hour and a half each. In many parishes there will be more than one infant catechumen at a time, especially if an annual or biannual cycle is followed. Instruction, therefore, can be done in one or more groups, permitting a rich interchange of ideas, questions, experience, and convictions. The sessions may be held in the parish facilities or in the homes of the participants, although the final session should be held at the church. Parents and local godparents should expect to attend all sessions. If this proves difficult because of scheduling, then those for whom it is a problem should be encouraged to enter instruction during the next cycle. The importance of the sacrament must be underscored by a commitment to adequate preparation. The sessions may be led by catechists or clergy; the officiating clergy-person should always participate in the last session, however.

The following topics could be covered in four sessions. Session One: The Theology of Christian Initiation. Discussion could begin with an exploration of human nature as members of the group have come to understand it in their own experience, looking closely at human potential and at those factors that block the achievement of that potential. They may be able to identify in their children the early emergence of both positive and selfish or destructive forces. This could lead into a discussion of baptism as God's way of restoring fallen human beings to a new and creative relationship with him. The interlocking elements of baptism outlined in Chapter 4 could be probed with profit.

Session Two: Christian Parenting. As the persons primarily responsible for the physical and spiritual development of their children, parents need to reflect on the anxieties, hopes, problems, and dreams that they bear. What seems to be easy and work well in their experience as parents? Where are there fears, hesitations, and enigmas? What insights, perspectives, and resources does Christian faith make available to parents? Does the rite of Christian initiation offer clues and cues to Christian parenting? Older parents in the group can be helpful in sharing learnings and experiences with first-time parents, but only after new parents have had a chance to express their perplexities and expectations.

Session Three: Incorporation and Nurture. This meeting could

be usefully devoted to the role of the church in helping parents and their newly baptized children live into the promise unlocked by the sacrament. The pastoral and educative function of the church should be discussed, and the pedagogical philosophy and practice of the local congregation should be outlined. How does the parish act in a concrete way to incorporate new Christians into the life and tradition of the church? Here specific programs could be explained. What expectations do parents in the group have of the congregation? What expectations does the parish have of parental involvement? How can godparents best exercise their nurturing and incorporative responsibilities? At the end of this session parents and sponsors should have a clearer understanding of how baptism is only the beginning of a long-term process and should feel confident that the parish is organized to help them help their children "grow into the full stature of Christ."⁷

Session Four: The Service Itself. The last gathering should be held where the baptism will take place. Normally this would be the church. All participants should be present to "walk through" the service so that they will be at ease and able to participate heartily. The leader of this session would do well to pay particular attention to explaining the actions and symbols of the rite. These physical movements and objects do much to illuminate and fix the meanings of baptism in the minds of the participants. Children present—and perhaps adults, as well—should be encouraged to touch or splash the water and feel and smell the chrism. Last minute questions and final observations should be elicited from the group.

Each session should open or close with one or more of the prayers in the section on the catechumenate in *The Book of Occasional Services*.⁸ On Sundays during the period of preparation the congregation should pray for the catechumens, parents and sponsors, mentioning the candidates by name if feasible. Again *The Book of Occasional Services* contains prayers that may be used as printed or adapted to local circumstances.⁹

Initiation. If an annual or biannual cycle is followed, the baptism will be held during the Easter Vigil or on Easter Day itself at one of the main services, on the First Sunday after Epiphany,

which celebrates the Baptism of Jesus, or, naturally, when the bishop visits. By design the Vigil incorporates baptism perfectly. Epiphany I is thematically well suited to the initiatory rite. For reasons of scheduling, Easter Day may be a more suitable time for infants. Care will have to be taken, however, in planning. Easter Day services tend to be crowded, embellished, and long. While Easter is the ideal time for baptisms, the meaning and centrality of baptism can be somewhat obscured by abundant flowers, egg baskets, and extensive music. No matter what time or occasion is chosen, all children in the congregation should be invited to come close to the font where they can see and feel a part of the action. Objective observations and subliminal recollections will reenforce the power of their own earlier baptisms in an immeasurable but important way.

Integration. A tremendous amount of learning takes place as we reflect on significant events in our lives after those events are actually past. Thus it is very important for the church to keep in touch with parents and their newly baptized children in the period immediately following the baptism. It would be wise for the priest or catechist to convene a meeting of those who prepared for baptism together within a month or two of the event. A useful discussion could flow from their remembrances of the baptism. What unexpected things happened? What discoveries were made as the rite unfolded? Are there any differences in their lives as a result of the process leading up to and away from the initiatory event? What needs further explanation? Where do parental responsibilities need shoring-up? The group may wish to agree to meet again in six months to compare experiences and progress again. In the meantime, the catechists (or any sponsor who may have been appointed to represent the parish) will want to make sure that the parents and the child move within the mainstream of parish life and take advantage of the continuing catechesis offered by the church.

Ingemination. The baptism of infants and small children is their complete initiation into Christ's body, the church. They can become no more fully Christian than they are when water has been poured, chrismation done, and bread and wine first given. They

need to grow into their new humanity but no further change in essence is required. Because a baptismal covenant was executed in their name by adults, it is expected that those initiated as children will want to renew the agreement when they reach maturity. How and when—even whether—that reiteration takes place is a very delicate matter that must not be taken for granted. Though it should never be forced or coerced, it must be anticipated, looked for, awaited.

Regular renewal points occur along the way as baptized children move toward maturity, the baptism of others, for example, and supremely the Holy Eucharist. Each child should be admitted to the eucharist as part of his full initiation, but parents will have to determine the frequency of communion and how instruction about the sacrament is to be given during childhood. The parish priest or catechist can be helpful to parents as they make decisions and in suggesting instructional materials appropriate to a given age. The use of any rite of admission to communion should be avoided completely, even if the child was not first fed at his initiation. Baptism is the only rite of admission to the prerogatives of the Christian life, including the eucharist. Baptism is cheapened if subsidiary ceremonies are employed.

The educational program of the parish will help the child review all aspects of the faith as maturation takes place. Central to that enterprise is the raising of tough and appropriate questions about the quality of one's commitment as successive stages of life are traversed. Somewhere adjacent to the mobile margins of adulthood, each Christian person should consider a mature and thoughtful renewal of his baptismal vows. There is no set chronological moment when this should happen, and certainly not at the onset of puberty, though there may be circumstances that would make that a good time. The first formal and personal renewal of the baptismal covenant is entirely situational—that is, when one has reached a climactic turning point that clamors for new meaning. A series of events in the late teens mark that period as the threshold of adulthood: attaining driving, drinking, and voting privileges. So the late teens may be the moment of renewal for some. For others the first job, graduation from school or college, or a marriage may raise the crucial religious questions that open the door to a mature affirmation of faith.

The issue for the church in all this is to develop a position of alert and creative challenge which stands somewhere between "hands off" and "hard sell." Where the balance is struck will depend on the philosophy and style of the local congregation. It is important, however, that an approach to confirmation or adult affirmation be consciously chosen and not merely the result of aimlessness. In small parishes the renewal question may be raised in one-to-one pastoral encounters. In larger parishes turning-point groups could be formed to discuss climactic events that a number of people may be experiencing at the same time, out of which ingeneration for some may emerge. In any case, a custom-made approach is clearly called for, rather than the modest assembly lines with which most clergy and congregations are familiar.

The Initiation of Older Children and Adults

In churches that do not practice believer's baptism exclusively, most children are baptized at infancy or shortly thereafter. In terms of preparation, it is difficult to know how to handle the preparation of children who come forward for baptism later on. Because corporate catechesis has great value, it is better to prepare them in a group, if that is possible, rather than to give them individual instruction. Because they will be making promises for themselves, a case can be made that they should be prepared with adult catechumens, even though they may miss some of the nuances of the discussion. Using a discussion format will enable the catechist or clergyperson to draw out older children, and every effort should be made to do so. Their perspectives, if given serious attention, will often contribute much.

At what age do we consider children to be *older* children? An arbitrary line of demarcation could be drawn at seven or eight, the age at which some churches have thought that a child is capable of the understanding necessary for admission to the eucharist. Probably the best way of making the judgment is on a case-by-case basis. This will require knowledge of the child and a certain pastoral sensitivity on the part of the parish priest.

The course of preparation for adults and older children passes through the same stages as those experienced by infants and their

parents and sponsors. Because older candidates are taking responsibility for themselves, however, the preparatory period may be longer or more intensive. We shall look at those options in due course.

Inquiry. Ways of access into the church for adult inquirers are probably more varied and complicated than for most children and their parents. There are those who arrive at the church door. During a period of searching, they may have shopped around for a church that suits their needs and been impressed with the liturgy, the clergy, the educational or outreach programs of the parish or the general atmosphere of the congregation. Others may come at the invitation or urging of a friend or neighbor. Recent studies have shown that this kind of personal recruiting is the principle route of entry for newcomers to the church. A few may begin to participate because they have met one of the clergy at an occasion away from parish premises and been attracted by his or her personality. Some parishes with active programs of evangelization reach out to the unbaptized through preaching missions, door-to-door visitation, and aggressive advertising campaigns. As a new seriousness about the importance of the initiation process develops in the church, parishes are likely to begin asking themselves hard questions about church growth and membership criteria. When boundaries are fuzzy and standards sloppy, growth issues tend to be avoided. When membership requirements are sharpened, the church becomes attractive and attracting.

As inquirers are identified, they should be issued an early invitation to a series of inquirers' meetings. These sessions should be held once or twice a year and scheduled far in advance so that the searchers can be given definite dates to put on their calendars. These meetings, led by clergy or catechists, are not meant to be adult confirmation classes. The aim is not to give instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith; it is, rather, to help inquirers clarify the questions they have and to impart preliminary information about the ethos of the denomination and the style and conventions of the congregation.

If a biannual initiatory cycle is followed, the parish should schedule inquirers' sessions in late Epiphany and late Pentecost.

Even if baptisms are held mainly at Easter and when the bishop visits, inquirers' sessions in late fall and early spring are geared to the time when many seekers appear on the parish scene. Until the sessions are held, newcomers should be encouraged to worship regularly and to participate in the educational opportunities offered by the parish. It should be explained that Holy Communion is for those who have been baptized. It should also be made clear that inquirers are expected to attend all of the introductory meetings and that they should plan their schedules accordingly. If calendars are too full to permit that kind of commitment, then they should aim for the next set of inquirers' sessions.

Three two-hour sessions should be ample to cover preliminary matters. The first meeting enables the various inquirers to meet one another, to share a bit about their spiritual journeys thus far, to discuss the specific issues that have brought them to this particular point of exploration, and to identify, if they can, what they are looking for. The second meeting is devoted to a sketch of Anglicanism and its particular approach to inquiry, theology, liturgy, spirituality, and authority. This should not be systematic instruction as much as an effort to describe the climate within which inquiry is taking place. The major points can be sharpened if participants are invited to contrast the Anglican style with other traditions with which they are familiar. The third meeting discusses what life in the particular parish at hand is all about. Several parishioners, representing different perspectives, could be invited to the session to present their views of the congregation. The similarities and differences they project could be enlightening. Time should be given to a sharing of mutual expectations. What standards does the parish have for membership? What needs do inquirers want to have met? Are there any irreconcilable gaps between the two?

At the end of the inquiry series each participant will decide whether or not to move on to an intensive period of catechesis which would start at the beginning of Lent or Advent. Those who decided to proceed should be assigned one or more sponsors from the congregation who will see the catechumen through the process. The sponsor(s) could be the person(s) who led the inquirer to the church or some other perceptive and well-grounded Chris-

tian. The period of inquiry ends with a liturgy of admission to the catechumenate such as the one in *The Book of Occasional Services*.¹⁰

Instruction. A basic question that needs to be settled as a matter of parish policy is whether those who enter the catechumenate to prepare for baptism can or should be instructed with those who are preparing for a renewal of their baptismal vows. In small parishes where there are not many candidates for either baptism or confirmation/reception/reaffirmation, it may be well to blend various kinds of candidates together; the mutual stimulation afforded may be helpful to all. But deft leadership will be required to prevent newcomers from being trampled by oldtimers. Another governing factor is the kind of educational resources available in the parish. Congregations with a broad-ranging adult education program, such as Theological Education by Extension,¹¹ may channel confirmation and reaffirmation candidates in that direction. Since parishes are so vastly different from each other, informed decisions must be made locally. Whatever decision is made, however, should be based on careful thought and analysis and not on what happens to be most convenient.

Another underlying issue is how long the instruction period should be and how many sessions it should encompass. The early church allowed for as many as three years of preparation. A similarly long period of time may be called for today in predominantly non-Christian countries. But in western culture, which has been so deeply shaped by Christianity, three years may not be necessary. Even one full year may be too long a period to sustain, though some parishes find that that time-frame works well. Because almost all parishes presently do minimal formal preparation for adult (or juvenile) initiation, a shorter, more intensive period may be a more realistic way to begin. Using Lent or Advent as the period of the catechumenate would permit seven sessions, the last one of which could be an all-day Saturday retreat. The accompanying tables (pp. 106–107) show how these sessions could be managed in short and otherwise busy seasons. Figure One indicates how virtually all of the sessions may be concentrated within the scope of each of the seasons, with the exception of the

retreat in the Advent/Epiphany cycle. Figure Two lays out a more relaxed schedule, with meetings actually starting toward the end of the preceding seasons and a service of admission to or enrollment in the catechumenate taking place on the suggested Sundays: Lent I and Advent I.¹²

A compact and intensive course of preparation is well-suited to the rhythm of contemporary society when many busy people find it difficult to make long-term commitments of time. They are often able to devote themselves to concentrated periods of work, given enough time to plan in advance. Those who would resist such an intense commitment may not be ready to give their spiritual development high priority. Those who are concerned about the short number of sessions need to be reminded that this is a course of preparation to enter into the ongoing life of a Christian community. This is not a mini-seminary course; all Christian knowledge does not have to be mastered. A strong parish will have a good continuing education program into which the newly initiated Christian can be guided.

FIGURE ONE

LENT/EASTER CYCLE	ADVENT/EPIPHANY CYCLE
<i>Admission: First Sunday in Lent</i>	<i>Admission: First Sunday of Advent</i>
Session 1 Week of Lent 1 Session 2 Week of Lent 1 Session 3 Week of Lent 2 Session 4 Week of Lent 2 Session 5 Week of Lent 3 Session 6 Week of Lent 4 Retreat: Week of Lent 5 (Holy Week Break)	Session 1 Week of Advent 1 Session 2 Week of Advent 1 Session 3 Week of Advent 2 Session 4 Week of Advent 2 Session 5 Week of Advent 3 Session 6 Week of Advent 3 (Christmas/New Year Break) Retreat: First Full Week of January
Baptism: Easter Vigil (or Day)	Baptism: First Sunday after the Epiphany

FIGURE TWO

LENT/EASTER CYCLE	ADVENT/EPIPHANY CYCLE
Session 1 Next to Last Week after the Epiphany	Session 1 Third to Last Week of Pentecost
Session 2 Last Week after the Epiphany	Session 2 Next to Last Week of Pentecost
	Session 3 Last Week of Pentecost
<i>Admission: First Sunday in Lent</i>	<i>Admission: First Sunday of Advent</i>
Session 3 Week of Lent 1	Session 4 Week of Advent 1
Session 4 Week of Lent 2	Session 5 Week of Advent 2
Session 5 Week of Lent 3	Session 6 Week of Advent 3
Session 6 Week of Lent 4	(Christmas/New Year Break)
Retreat: Week of Lent 5 (Holy Week Break)	Retreat: First Full Week of January
Baptism: Easter Vigil (or Day)	Baptism: First Sunday after the Epiphany

The sessions could be ordered in the following way: Sessions One and Two deal with conversion issues. What are the dynamics of dying to self and rising to a new life in Christ? What do Christians understand about good and evil? How does wickedness corrupt social structures as well as individuals? Who is Jesus Christ and how is he the key to salvation? How can one be related to and empowered by him today? These sessions would be an appropriate time for catechumens to spend some quiet, private time thinking through and, perhaps, writing out the specific things they wish to renounce. These need not be shared with anyone and can be destroyed in some fashion during the baptismal liturgy.

Sessions Three and Four are devoted to matters of incorporation. What is the nature of the church? What is its mission within God's economy? How are the needs for unity and diversity kept

in balance within the communal life of the church? What does one need to understand about the tools of spiritual formation: Holy Scripture, the sacraments, private prayer, and corporate worship?

Sessions Five and Six focus on ministry issues. What does the church understand about Christian vocation? How do Christians discover their own particular calling? What are the ethical implications of living in an imperfect world? What are the roles of bishops, priests, and deacons in the church and how do they help the *laos* do its work?

The concluding retreat places its emphasis on coming to a final decision about baptism (or confirmation/reception/reaffirmation, if candidates for those actions are included). Bible study and meditation should be an important part of the retreat. Time should be provided for personal conferences with the parish priest or catechist. A useful exercise would be the preparation of a provisional plan for each person's spiritual/vocational development during the forthcoming year or more, a plan that could be reviewed at a subsequent retreat. For those who decide to go ahead with initiation or renewal, the service(s) should be gone over so everyone is at ease about the approaching liturgical event(s).

Initiation. The service itself has been described from various angles elsewhere in this study. It is important to add here, however, that the impact on all participants can be heightened if as much imagination as possible is used in thinking through and planning out the liturgy. Though the Prayer Book rite is powerful as printed, it is always used in a seasonal context and, as a result, may reflect different aspects of initiation. The classic time for baptisms is the Easter Vigil where the elements of darkness and light, death and resurrection are unavoidable. The vigil makes its own potent statement. The First Sunday after the Epiphany enables easy and appropriate connections between the baptism of Jesus and our baptism in terms of vocation and empowerment for ministry. Baptisms at the time of the bishop's visitation take on a different flavor, since they are quite plainly seen as the start of a process of spiritual growth that may well lead to other turning points along the way. These several contexts, as well as many other variations, indicate the rich educative possibilities that stem

from the liturgical occasion itself; they must not be allowed to slip by in a *pro forma* fashion.

Integration. The catechumens' sponsors may have traveled with them through the instruction period and stood with them at baptism, but they may be most helpful during the stage of integration. It is important, especially in highly mobile times, for new Christians to find their way solidly into the life of the local church. Sponsors are meant to be mentors and guides for the neophytes. For its part, the congregation should continue to pray for the new Christians with regularity in Sunday services for a period following their baptism. This practice not only draws on much-needed spiritual resources, but also reminds the whole community that new members are in their midst and need to be received with warmth and helpfulness.

As with parents and godparents of infant candidates, it would be useful for the new Christians to meet with their sponsors and those who prepared them within a month or so of their initiation. This will give them a chance to reflect on the event and identify new learnings and emerging new perspectives. The meeting will give everyone concerned an early reading on how well the incorporation process is going.

This may be a good time for the neophytes to do an inventory of talents or skills that they wish to offer the congregation or specific needs that the parish can help them fulfil. It would also be a good time for the new Christians to take on specific assignments with a working group inside the parish or develop a special mission outside of the parish—alone or with a parish outreach group. The aim of these projects is to involve new members with others in the congregation around a common task. The adopted task should be an outgrowth of the discussions about ministry and vocation in the instruction phase and the provisional plan made at the prebaptismal retreat.

Another meeting of the group could be planned nine months to a year later to close out the integration phase. A review of how well inclusion in the parish takes place will enable those responsible for the complete initiatory process to do a more effective job in the future. It will also enable everyone involved to feel that

the sequence has been completed and a certain commitment discharged.

Ingemination. If baptism is full initiation into Christ's body, the church, there is no need for newly baptized adults to be confirmed. Confirmation is meant to be a mature reiteration of one's baptismal promises, so it is the appropriate rite for those who were baptized as infants or small children, but not for adults. However, the spiritual journeys of people baptized as adults are likely to take as many twists and turns as those who were baptized as children. In addition to the regular renewal of the baptismal covenant in the eucharist and at the baptism of others, there may come a time when formal reaffirmation in the presence of the bishop will be an important thing to do.

As stressed in the previous section on ingemination, turning points of faith cannot be forced or predicted, but they must be expected and carefully addressed by those responsible for the pastoral life of a congregation. Sensitive pastoral care and spiritual direction are key elements in anticipating spiritual turning points, of course, but it is also helpful if all baptized persons are prepared to expect them, encouraged to seek help to negotiate them, and understand the creative possibilities of marking them liturgically.

This chapter has sketched in rather swift and bold strokes schematic plans for preparing people for baptism. The details must be filled in by others. These brief but comprehensive models are meant to be suggestive rather than prescriptive. They are intended to raise issues around which each local church must custom-make its own response. There are many variations on the preparatory theme; some of them are described in Chapter 7. The Appendix includes a list of resource materials outlining other approaches that also may be adapted to grass roots situations. The key factor is taking initiation seriously enough to develop a plan that makes sense in the particular Christian community at hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Parish Models and Diocesan Guidelines

IN the early stages of the baptismal revolution of the late twentieth century, certain parts of the church have begun to test new ways of taking Christian initiation seriously. These efforts are scattered, uncoordinated, and relatively few in number. They range from rudimentary first steps to complicated and highly sophisticated processes. Experiments are taking place in large urban parishes and in small congregations, in sparsely settled western dioceses and jurisdictions with huge cities, many parishes, and large numbers of communicants.

Although there are, quite possibly, scores of parishes and dozens of dioceses in which the implications of baptismal renewal are being worked out with imagination and dedication, research for this book uncovered only a few whose efforts have gained wide notice. As stimuli for further conversation and experimentation, this chapter sets forth the practices and experiences of three quite different congregations and one diocese. None of the parishes is in the diocese cited.

Three Congregational Approaches to Baptismal Renewal

Case One:

A medium-size parish in a small town near a large metropolitan area.

The rector, who has an important liturgical responsibility in his diocese, has been working throughout his entire ministry on re-

covering the centrality of baptism. He has found it difficult to get ordinary parishioners to accept the positions he holds to be crucial:

- that baptisms should be held once a year at the Easter Vigil;
- that a child's salvation will not be jeopardized if baptism is postponed;
- that the entire Christian community needs to be prepared for baptism in addition to the family of the one being baptized;
- that baptism means renewal for everyone;
- that the language of the rite suggests serious commitment.

After some years of trying to sell his point of view, he came to feel that the parish regarded him as "a little funny" on the matter of baptism. Rather than having a new approach to baptism viewed as a personal quirk of the rector, he introduced the issue to the parish worship committee and elicited their interest and support. The committee has developed a simple statement of baptismal policy that is being put forward for discussion and adoption by the parish as a whole. This frees the rector from being the sole agent of change, he feels, and enables him to be pastorally available to people who want baptisms done in the old way.

Here is the committee's first attempt at a statement:

A Proposed Baptism Policy

Definition:

Christian life begins with Baptism; it is the entrance of the individual into the Christian community. Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the church.

In This Parish We Believe:

A. Baptism is a public rite, celebrated within the Eucharist, with the church community participating.

B. Baptism is administered at four feasts during the church year: All Saints Day; Easter Vigil; Pentecost; and the First Sunday after the Epiphany (Baptism of our Lord); and on the occasion of a visit by the Bishop.

C. It is important that there must be an understanding of the covenant and the meaning of the sacrament of baptism. Some education of the

adult candidate, or in the cases of child, the parents and godparents, is necessary.

Case Two:

A twenty-five year old medium-sized parish in a semi-suburban section of a major city.

This congregation is composed largely of young families and single persons. There are lots of weddings and baptisms and very few burials.

Preparation of infant candidates and their parents begins with pastoral calling in the hospital at the time of birth. An informal adaptation of the Prayer Book office of Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child is used with the parents.¹ Thanksgiving for the birth of the child is also expressed in the intercessions on Sunday.

Couples whose interest in the parish is primarily prompted by a desire to have their baby baptized are asked to make a commitment to the parish before the baptism proceeds. Sometimes a new family is asked to attend services regularly for a few months to make sure that they want to be a part of this particular Christian community.

Normally one of the clergy calls on the family at home to begin planning for the baptism. Emphasis is placed on the quality of godparents with a suggestion that at least two of them be good examples of Christian faith and life and able to relate to the child. A brief folder prepared by the parish on the purpose and practice of baptism is reviewed with the parents.

The day before the baptism, parents, godparents, and grandparents (if available) meet with the clergy for a one-hour session. Discussion centers around the questions addressed to parents and godparents in the baptismal service and what their answers imply. The baptismal covenant is also examined to help the participants further understand the faith and practice into which the child is growing. The service itself is reviewed so that everyone knows what will happen and when. Coffee is served after the session so that the several families usually involved in preparing for a baptism will have a chance to get to know one another better and develop a sense of community.

Because there are so many young families in the parish, baptisms are done throughout the church year, except in Lent. Baptisms are grouped together when practicable. As many as possible are saved for the bishop's visit. Pastoral need, however, is the primary consideration in scheduling.

The sacrament is celebrated at the main service on Sunday with choir and festive songs. Baptismal families come to the church door with the clergy to be greeted by the people as they move from church to coffee hour. The candidates and their families are listed in the bulletin for that Sunday and are remembered in the public and private prayers of the parish for a time.

Children are admitted to communion at whatever age the parents can manage, but the policy of the clergy is the earlier the better. Those who are baptized as infants are not confirmed as children. Adult inquirers' classes are designed to include older teenagers and the emphasis is on mature decision-making and long-term commitments.

A fair number of unbaptized adults are attracted to this parish. Its per capita adult baptisms are probably the highest in the diocese. Two kinds of preparation are offered adult candidates.

The most commonly used method is private tutorials with one of the clergy. In these sessions the baptismal service itself is used as a framework with emphasis placed on the core questions and the baptismal covenant. The candidate is encouraged to read privately in *The Church's Teaching Series*² volumes on scripture, worship, and history according to interest or need. As many sessions are held as are necessary to enable the candidate to make a realistic decision to be baptized. The minimum tends to be eight one-hour meetings. The other method centers around inquirers' classes which are offered every winter. They culminate with baptism and/or confirmation when the bishop visits.

In evaluating the experience of his parish, the rector writes:

We have spent a lot of time and effort teaching about baptism. We can affirm baptism as full initiation—joining the Church—membership in Christ. By limiting confirmation to its original historic dimensions, the radical nature of baptismal birth-to-new-life becomes clear for people. By making baptism public and celebrating it in the context of the eucharist, the congregation can sense those necessary connections. By frequent

resort to the baptismal covenant people really seem to be catching the connection between asserted faith and corporate practice. The ethical imperatives of baptism can't be missed.

We have neither succeeded nor failed in all this. We just keep working at it. In the last five years our people have gained a greater sense of what's sacramental, and how God acts through chosen forms and materials, including us. I think most folk here would tell you that baptism is how Christians are born (yes, born again), and eucharist is how we are fed and strengthened to carry out what baptism begins. In that sense, both dominical sacraments are more "real" for garden variety Episcopalians, and our sense of community is thereby stronger.³

Case Three:

*A mission church in a small port city near a huge, rapidly growing metropolis.*⁴

The vicar, a nationally known liturgical scholar and consultant, has developed a sophisticated and comprehensive theology of Christian initiation and has made that theology operative in the baptismal practice of this congregation. Building on the intertwined insights of Christian doctrine and secular psychology, he sees the process of Christian initiation as inextricably related to a universal threefold human phenomenon. The first phase, called "separation," involves a feeling that one's world is falling apart, that old values no longer serve. The second or "liminal" phase is a time of being in-between; it is marked by feelings of restlessness and longing; it is culminated by an insight or disclosure that a new, as-yet-unknown situation may be possible. The third phase is one of aggregation or assimilation; a new world begins to take shape for the individual, involving new understanding and a new way of living.

The approach to baptism used in this congregation is based on the conviction that all people experience this three-phase phenomenon and that everyone is in one phase or another at any given moment. Conversion is the term used to describe the phenomenon when it takes place in a religious context. The rites of Christian initiation in the Episcopal Church reflect the threefold phenomenon and show through word, action, and symbol that one not only survives the disintegration of an old world but is raised to a new and creative level of being.

Taking the phenomenon seriously, the congregation is committed to a significant period of preparation for baptism, usually nine months to a year. Because the method involved requires maturity, it is reserved to adult candidates who are no younger than the early 20s. The initiatory process has four stages. Each concludes with the celebration of a rite that is the culmination of what has gone before.

The first stage, evangelization or precatechumenate, is initiated when an adult makes an inquiry about baptism or the Christian faith. The vicar meets with the person several times to help him or her clarify motives and to unfold the process that leads to baptism. This stage ends with a public rite of admission to the catechumenate. Trained and carefully selected sponsors, who will guide the inquirer through the process, stand with the person during the ceremony.

Stage two is the catechumenate which is understood to be "conversion therapy." The components of this stage are (1) presentations on basic Christian beliefs, (2) encouragement and instruction in the life of prayer, (3) regular association with the baptized in corporate worship, and (4) assigned work in the area of social justice. All four elements involve the sharing of insights by the catechumens and the catechists and the interaction enables conversion to proceed. Prayers of exorcism are used from time to time to give the catechumens a sense of movement, purify motives, and discard unchristian values. The second stage culminates with a rite of enrollment into candidacy for baptism which takes place on the First Sunday in Lent.

Stage three is the forty days of Lent, a time of intense preparation similar to the practice of the early church. The catechumenate meets twice a week, studying the Lenten gospel readings at one session and exploring basic Christian themes as they relate to human experience in the other meeting. On each Sunday in Lent the candidate kneels before the congregation as they pray for continued purification and illumination. On Easter Eve the candidate and the catechists gather for a prebaptismal retreat. The culminating liturgical action is baptism itself.

The mission church has only one service on Easter, the Great Vigil, which is celebrated at dawn. The disappearing dark and

emerging light of that time of day are used with imagination. The renunciations of evil in the baptismal rite are done in a dark place and the affirmations of adherence to Christ are made facing the rising sun. A large, portable, tomb-like font has been placed in the church and Baptism is done by immersion as an unambiguous way of manifesting "the human process of separation/liminality/aggregation imaged forth in Jesus dead, buried, and rising." Having been led out of the font by their sponsors, the candidates are anointed and clothed in a white garment. They are welcomed into the fellowship of the baptized as a sign of having moved into the stage of assimilation or aggregation. This is ritualized by sharing the peace and receiving communion.

Since the high level of anticipation of such an event may lead to a psychological "crash" after it is over, there is a fourth stage of initiation which corresponds to the aggregation phase of the threefold internal human phenomenon. The catechists and the neophytes continue to meet each Sunday during the fifty days of Easter to help the new Christians assimilate all that has happened and to allow the church to continue its nurture of those who are fresh in the faith. Prayers for the neophytes continue in corporate worship. At the end of this period, the newly baptized are presented to the bishop in a worship service so that their baptisms are related to the universal church.

The initiatory process of the congregation provides a pattern for education across the board. Classes for parents of infants being baptized, for adults who were baptized as infants and now want to renew their promises, for baptized persons who are entering the Episcopal Church from another communion are all modeled on the fourfold dimension of the catechumenate, since all are going through a process of conversion. Even *Cursillo* and *Marriage Encounter* take the form of mini-catechumenal experiences.

An Approach to Diocesan Guidelines

Although individual congregations have taken their own initiative in scattered instances across the church, a more orderly and effective way to enhance the rethinking and renewal of initiatory policies and practices is for dioceses to work on the issues corpo-

ately. A collegial approach enables the sharing of a broad range of experience and conviction and can help prevent confusing and competitive policies based on purely parochial preferences. A number of dioceses in the Episcopal Church have developed guidelines for their congregations. One of them is presented below as an example that others may wish to follow or adapt.⁵

NORMS FOR BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

Baptism is to be celebrated as the Chief Service on Sunday or other Feast Day except in the case of emergency or personal hardship.

Insofar as possible, Baptisms should be reserved for those occasions of the Bishop's visit and the Easter Eve Vigil. If for weighty pastoral reasons additional occasions are required, the day of Pentecost, the First Sunday after Epiphany, All Saints' Day, or the Sunday after All Saints' Day are appropriate.

As in the early days of the Church, Baptism and the Laying-on-of-Hands have been reunited in a single rite. It is therefore appropriate to reserve Baptisms and the Laying-on-of-Hands for those occasions when the Bishop can be present to preside.⁶ This will help us to understand initiation into the Christian Faith as the one never to be repeated experience in which the initiate is made a full member of the family of God in the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Individuals should be presented to the Bishop for the Laying-on-of-Hands on the basis of personal commitment and involvement in the Community of the Faithful rather than on age or grade level.⁷

GUIDELINES FOR BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

1. The Easter Vigil is the occasion of Christian Initiation. Every congregation is encouraged to use Lent in its original sense, as a time to prepare candidates for baptism at the great Vigil.
2. Otherwise, insofar as possible, let baptisms and confirmations be administered at the time of the bishop's visitation.
3. In order that this may not be too great a hardship, weekday visits may be arranged in addition to the annual Sunday visitation.
4. It is particularly appropriate that the bishop preside at adult baptisms since this is the individual's affirmation of faith and the service called confirmation in the 1979 Book is redundant for one baptized as an adult.

5. At the time of the bishop's visitation those who did not receive the laying on of hands at their baptism may so receive. This would include:
 - a. Those baptized with the 1928 rite and who have reached the "customary age for Confirmation."
 - b. Those baptized using the rite set forth in *Services for Trial Use or Authorized Services 1973* if Chrism was *not* used.
 - c. Those coming from another tradition. However, since Holy baptism is full and complete initiation it is in order to simply "receive" such individuals into this branch of Christ's Holy Church.
6. All of the individuals named above should receive preparation and instruction as in former confirmation classes. Particular care should be taken to insure understanding of the questions that will be put to each candidate by the bishop.
7. It is requested that all baptisms be according to the rite set forth in the 1979 Prayer Book. When baptism is administered by a priest alone, Chrismation should invariably accompany the laying on of hands. This is the sacramental act of confirmation. What may take place at a later time and is referred to as "confirmation" in the 1979 Book is a public witness of personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
8. All baptisms celebrated with the 1979 rite should be entered in the parish register under both baptism *and* confirmation.⁸

PREPARATION FOR ADULT BAPTISM

The complex act which we call the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and which is described in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as "full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit," has frequently in Christian tradition been preceded and followed by other rites which, although theologically dependent on Baptism and deriving their meaning from it, have at various times and places been important parts of the ongoing process of Christian Initiation.

One such rite is provided in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer: Confirmation. Confirmation is defined in the Catechism of that Book as "the rite in which we express a mature commitment to Christ and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop." Confirmation so defined appropriately finds a place in the initiatory process when those baptized in infancy are prepared "to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism."

When Baptism is administered to adults, on the other hand, there is necessarily a period of preparation between the candidates' first approach to the Church and their baptismal profession of faith. It has often been the practice to mark the beginning of their journey into faith by a formal rite of admission to the Catechumenate. We find evidence of a Christian Catechumenate in the writings of Tertullian and Hippolytus at the beginning of the third century, and the writers of the third and fourth centuries generally assume its existence as an immemorial "apostolic tradition" of the Church. The traditional position of Catechumens in the Church was recognized among Roman Catholics as recently as Vatican Council II in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 14:

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church, are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own.

The language of *Lumen Gentium* may strike the ears of Episcopalians strangely but the principle is truly traditional. Catechumens have a serious claim upon the Church. They are in the process of becoming a Christian. St. Ambrose was a Catechumen when he was elected Bishop of Milan.

The restoration of the catechumenate is not at the present time a mere matter of historical curiosity. There are important reasons why the Episcopal Church should seriously consider making provision for the Catechumenate today.

The first and most important is the existence of a substantial number of unbaptized adults. An increasing number of these persons, products of the cultural disruptions of the past decades, have had little or no experience of Christianity as a living religion. For such persons the course of instruction commonly given in Episcopal Churches to adult converts, which is frequently concerned with how Episcopalians differ from other Christians, is often inadequate. Their situation is more like that of converts from paganism for whom various Provinces of the Anglican Communion have long provided prebaptismal rites and an extended period of formation.

The general picture of the faith and practice of the Christian Church presented by our culture and reflected in the mass media is grossly inadequate. Persons whose only knowledge of Christianity is on this level cannot be prepared for Baptism by conventional fact-centered instruction. A period of training in Christian values, life-style, and perspectives is essential for them.

The classical pattern of the Catechumenate provided for such a period of formation lasting usually three years or longer. Whether such a lengthy Catechumenate is always needed in our culture may be doubted, but there is wisdom in the traditional stages of the Catechumenate:

Stage 1. The Pre-Catechumenal Period. To this stage belong inquirers' classes with sufficient preparation for the inquirers to determine that they wish to become Christians.

Stage 2. The Catechumenate. Entry into the Catechumenate is by a public liturgical act (which may take place for individuals or groups at any appropriate time) at the principal parish Sunday liturgy, and normatively includes signing with the cross. To this stage belong regular association with the worshiping community, the practice of life in accordance with the Gospel, encouragement and instruction in the life of prayer, and basic instruction in the history of salvation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This stage would vary in length according to the need of the individual. For those persons who, although unbaptized, have possessed an understanding and appreciation of the Christian religion for some time, it might be relatively short.

Stage 3. Candidacy for Baptism. To this stage belong a series of liturgical acts leading up to Baptism. These normatively take place on a series of Sundays preceding one of the fixed days for Baptism (of which the Sundays of Lent in preparation for Baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter are the principal example) and involve public prayer for the Candidates who are present at the service as a group accompanied by their Sponsors.

The Book of Occasional Services, from which the above description is taken, provides appropriate rites and prayers for use with persons preparing for Baptism.

The Roman Catholic Church has also issued a formal "Rite of Becoming Catechumens" as a part of their new *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. This rite is probably much more complex than we require, but it sets out possibilities for what could be done. Their treatment of this material is both excellent and traditional and can easily be mined for ideas by those planning to implement such a program.

There is great appropriateness in providing a simple rite for admission to the Catechumenate. Simple rites for the period of Candidacy would also be appropriate. If the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is to be ministered

at Easter, enrollment as a Candidate would appropriately take place at the beginning of Lent, or if the Baptism is to take place at the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord the enrollment might take place at the beginning of Advent.

The witness of transformation of life which this kind of Catechumenate affords the whole congregation has been and should be a leaven for the continual transformation of the whole Church.

This chapter has set forth the policies developed by three dissimilar congregations and a diocese that is small in numbers and large in geography. They are offered as examples of what local initiative and imagination can do. While some approaches are more modest than others, each is an attempt to take seriously the implications of the emerging baptismal revolution. Four concluding observations about them may be helpful.

(1) While terminology and specific details may vary, the basic thrust of each case reflects the arguments of this book. What is particularly encouraging is that this study and each of the models cited developed at separate times and in virtual isolation from each other. They are part of an unstructured but gradually converging movement that is churchwide in scope.

(2) Just because policies are developed (by a diocese, for instance) does not mean they will be implemented. Discipline and determination are needed. A priest in another diocese that has developed thoroughgoing guidelines on baptism writes,

Implementation here has been dismal. On a scale of 1 to 10, the best we could rate . . . is 1.5. Only one parish, to my knowledge, has developed a catechumenate. Another is being slowly and carefully prepared for this. Beyond that (the policy) has been filed away by most of the clergy. . . . The reasons vary from stubbornness to conviction to indifference, but the results are the same—a policy on paper gathering dust.⁹

(3) Where new visions of Christian initiation have been developed and implemented, initiative has come from a bishop, a parish priest, or a small group of clergy and laity working in concert who have been willing to risk a disturbance of the *status quo*. Patience and persistence have been required, but the results have been worthwhile.

(4) None of the models offered in this chapter should be initiated automatically or unthinkingly. They are presented simply to show how the renewal of the primal sacrament may have many variations, each keyed to local needs and circumstances. It is hoped that these few pioneering experiences may be catalytic for many others.

Notes

Introduction

¹Murphy Center for Liturgical Research, ed., *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978) p. 168.

²The Book of Common Prayer, p. 298.

³See the post-baptismal prayer of thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 308.

⁴Matthew 28:19.

Chapter One

¹Exodus 24:3-8.

²Genesis 17:4-14.

³Leviticus 15:13 and Numbers 19:11-13, for example.

⁴Ezekiel 36:17-21, 23-24.

⁵Manual of Discipline, viii. 14.

⁶Luke 3:3.

⁷Isaiah 53:12.

⁸Mark 15:28.

⁹Luke 12:49-50.

¹⁰Mark 10:38.

¹¹Mark 10:39b.

¹²The new catechism in the 1979 Prayer Book wisely finesses the issue by referring to baptism and the eucharist as "the two great sacraments of the Gospel," though it still states that they were "given by Christ to his Church," p. 858.

¹³John 3:22; 4:1-2.

¹⁴Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1978) pp. 14-15.

¹⁵Acts 9:17-18.

¹⁶Acts 8:14-16.

¹⁷Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 19.

- ¹⁸For a more complete and scholarly commentary on this point, see Reginald Fuller, "Christian Initiation in the New Testament" in Murphy Center for Liturgical Research, ed., *Made, Not Born*, pp. 24-26.
- ¹⁹Adapted from *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* in E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970) 2nd ed. pp. 3-7.
- ²⁰For a more complete discussion of origins and meanings of the use of anointing in baptism, see Chapter 4, p. 51.
- ²¹Peter Hinchcliff, "Initiation: The Modern Period" in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, eds, *The Study of Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 134.

Chapter Two

- ¹Acts 16:11-15. Emphasis added.
- ²Acts 16:25-33. Emphasis added.
- ³I Corinthians 1:16. Emphasis added.
- ⁴Acts 2:38. Emphasis added.
- ⁵Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (New York: The Seabury Press 1979) p. 113.
- ⁶Matthew 18:3-4.
- ⁷Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 2.
- ⁸Nathan D. Mitchell, "Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation" in Murphy Center, *Made, Not Born*, pp. 50-82.
- ⁹*Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ¹⁰J. D. C. Fisher, "Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed Rites" in Jones, et. al., *The Study of Liturgy*, p. 122.
- ¹¹D. H. Tripp, "The Radical Reformation" in Jones, et. al., *The Study of Liturgy*, p. 133.
- ¹²Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974) p. 11.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ¹⁵Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 106.
- ¹⁶Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980) p. 269.
- ¹⁷See the prayer said over an adult being admitted to the catechumenate in *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1979) p. 116.
- ¹⁸The Book of Common Prayer, p. 304. Note that other promises reflecting social concern and missionary responsibility ensue.

¹⁹See Chapter 6 for some suggestions about how this may be done.

²⁰Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, p. 271.

²¹Fisher, in Jones, et. al., *The Study of Liturgy*, pp. 129-130.

²²Daniel B. Stevick, *Holy Baptism: Supplement to Prayer Book Studies* 26, (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1973) p. 73.

²³Meeting of the House of Bishops, Pocono Manor, PA, October 1971.

²⁴The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 309-310 and 418-419.

Chapter Three

¹Fuller, "Christian Initiation in the New Testament" in Murphy Center, *Made, Not Born*, p. 19.

²Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, pp. 151-152.

³See the concluding prayer in the service of Holy Baptism in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 308.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁵*The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism* [A Study Document Issued by the Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland], p. 39.

⁶At least one scholar and critic takes issue with using the term "ordination" in connection with baptism. He believes that it warps the sacrament along clerical lines of thought and diminishes the sacrament by using modern perceptions of clerical ordination to work out a theology of baptism. He prefers the term "consecration," since it is baptismal consecration which creates the context for ordered ministries. That is a fine and useful theological point. However, if all ministries are to have parity, it is important to use the same language to describe them.

⁷See I Corinthians 12:4-31, noting especially vv. 8-11 and v. 28.

⁸The Book of Common Prayer, p. 855.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹¹*The Rite of Baptism for Children and The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*. (See Bibliography.)

¹²*The Book of Occasional Services*, pp. 112-130. The opening section entitled "Concerning the Catechumenate" is especially worthy of note.

¹³Fisher, in Jones, et. al., *The Study of Liturgy*, p. 120.

Chapter Four

¹Mitchell, in Murphy Center, *Made, Not Born*, p. 71.

²The Book of Common Prayer, p. 306.

³*Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁴Romans 6:3-11.

⁵The Book of Common Prayer (1928), p. 280.

⁶Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, p. 2.

⁷John 9:1–12.

⁸Acts 9:3–19.

⁹Gwen Kennedy Neville, "Baptism: A Life-Crisis Liturgy" in *Learning Through Liturgy* (The Seabury Press, 1978) p. 68.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 305–306.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹³Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, p. 279.

¹⁴The Joint Liturgical Group, *Initiation and Eucharist* (London: S.P.C.K., 1973) p. 12.

¹⁵The Book of Common Prayer, p. 306.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹⁸Matthew 26:26–29.

¹⁹Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16.

Chapter Five

¹Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, p. 275.

Chapter Six

¹*The Book of Occasional Services*, pp. 112–125.

²*Ibid.*, p. 112.

³*Ibid.*, p. 113 ff.

⁴Sharon Begley with John Carey, "The Wisdom of Babies" in *Newsweek*, January 12, 1981, pp. 71–72.

⁵Harry Boone Porter, *Jeremy Taylor: Liturgist* (London: S.P.C.K., 1979) pp. 30–31. An abbreviated form of this prayer is included in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 444, under the title "For a child not yet baptized." The full form may also be seen in Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, p. 446.

⁶*The Book of Occasional Services*, pp. 115 and 120.

⁷The Book of Common Prayer, p. 302.

⁸*The Book of Occasional Services*, pp. 117–120.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 115 ff.

¹¹A thorough, long-range system of theological education for lay persons in the parish setting conceived and operated by the School of Theology at the University of the South, Sewanee, TN 37375.

¹²*The Book of Occasional Services*, p. 120.

Chapter Seven

¹The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 439-445.

²Seven volumes, The Seabury Press, 1979.

³Personal correspondence with the author.

⁴What follows is an approved digest of an article entitled "Imaging the Story of Jesus through Baptism" by Robert J. Brooks in *The Christian Ministry*, July 1979.

⁵The Diocese of Utah.

⁶Since this small diocese has only eighteen parishes and missions, it is relatively easy for the bishop to be present on more than one occasion during the year.

⁷*The 1974 Convention Journal*, Diocese of Utah.

⁸Though these policies were put into effect in the diocese in May 1978, the designation of the current Book of Common Prayer has been changed here to "1979," the date of its final adoption.

⁹Personal correspondence with the author.

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Selected Resources

While many clergy or clergy/lay committees will want to custom-make their own curricula for use in preparing people for baptism, a survey of much of the current resource material has turned up a number of useful study books, leaders guides, films, and filmstrips. A representative sampling of these appears below.

The author wishes to thank The Source, an ecumenical educational resource center in Takoma Park, Maryland, which serves the Washington-Baltimore area, for invaluable help given in sorting out and evaluating the material from which this list is derived. A number of other metropolitan areas in the country have comparable resource centers. They are excellent places to use for sampling what's available. Many, like The Source, would be glad to add to their storehouse of resources new educational material on baptism recommended by those who would use them.

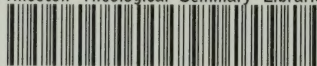
1. *Baptism*. Two filmstrips and record; extensive printed material, including leader's guide, worksheets, leaflets, and poster; music suggestions on record; graded for three age groups, including adults; 1978. Methodist Publishing House (Graded Press), 201 Eighth Avenue, So., Nashville, TN 37202.
2. *Baptism*. A filmstrip explaining the symbols of baptism. Teleketics: Franciscan Communications Center, 1229 So. Santee St., Los Angeles, CA 90015.
3. *Baptism* by Gaynell Cronin. Filmstrips and tape cassette; two sections: instruction for children, renewal for adults; 1975; \$24.95. Ikonographics, Box 4454, Louisville, KY 40204.
4. *Baptism*. A twenty-minute color film comparing the baptismal rites and their special meanings of five different Christian traditions: Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Christian/Disciples of Christ, and Methodist; Family Films.

5. *Baptism: Claimed and Named*. A six-session course for junior high youth; student book and teacher's guide. Augsburg Publishing House, 426 So. Fifth St., Minneapolis, MN 55415.
6. *Baptism: Initiation into the Christian Community*. A filmstrip focusing on the conversion experiences of adulthood, the history of adult initiation, and the new Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Paulist Press, 545 Island Road, Ramsey, NJ 07446.
7. *Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging*. A ten-minute color film about a Mexican boy who is disfigured by a fire which kills his family and who finds a home in an orphanage. Teleketics: Franciscan Communications Center.
8. *By Water and the Spirit* by Eugene L. Brand and S. Anita Stauffer. Two pamphlets—one a pastor's guide—related to the rite of baptism in the Lutheran Book of Worship; amply illustrated with black and white photographs; the pastor's guide includes two models for instruction; 1979; around \$5.00. Parish Life Press, Philadelphia, PA.
9. *Christian Initiation Resources*. A quarterly packet of pertinent reflective and practical materials to help with the implementation of the new Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation and the restoration of the catechumenate to a central position in parish life; expensive, exhaustive, and adaptable to other denominational approaches; each annual volume has a three-ring notebook for filing and storage; started in 1980. William H. Sadlier, Inc., 11 Park Place, New York, NY 10007.
10. *Godparent Gussie*. A brief cartoon outlining the history of baptism and confirmation. Teleketics: Franciscan Communications Center.
11. *God's Own Child* by William V. and Patricia R. Coleman. A program for parents about to present a child for baptism; three group sessions plus individual counseling; workbook-type parents booklet; amplified edition for leaders; related to Roman Catholic rite; 1977; around \$7.00. Twenty-Third Publications, Box 180, West Mystic, CT 06388.
12. *Growing in God's Love*. Colorful materials to help parents understand the development of a child; includes a growth chart poster, mobile, mailing pieces, baptism anniversary cards; related to item 16 below; about \$5.00. Fortress Press, 2900 Queen Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19129.
13. *How Sacraments Celebrate Our Story*. A general church school course on the sacraments stressing celebration, journey, and the child's personal story; good but short section on baptism; attractive illustrations; some useful exercises. St. Mary's Press, Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987.

14. *In, Not of: Living our Baptism in the World* by William H. Lazareth and Raymond Tiemeyer. A course for adults; participants book and study guide. Lutheran Church Press.
15. *Letters to Parents*. An attractive, colorful kit containing short letters and postcards to be sent to parents from the birth of a child until the third birthday; 1971; about \$2.50. Fortress Press.
16. *Ministering to Children from Birth to Age Three* by Linda Schomaker. Related to item 12 above; includes an interesting tape cassette and filmstrip on "How Babies Grow; How Babies Learn"; 1980; booklet about \$4.00, filmstrip/cassette about \$10.00. Fortress Press.
17. *A New Life*. An eight-session curriculum to involve students in the concepts and meanings of baptism; materials include a teacher's guide, an idea book containing 82 activities coded to match particular sessions, and a liturgical kit providing suggestions for the celebration of baptism; 1977. Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota, 309 Clifton Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55403.
18. *Rainshower*. A fourteen-minute color film using a summer rainstorm to illustrate and celebrate God's refreshing love which renews the earth and, by implication, us. Teleketics: Franciscan Communications Center.
19. *The Sacraments* by Richard A. Jensen and Duane A. Priebe. A thirteen-session course on Baptism and Communion; a thorough but brief exposition of the history, theology, and practice of the two sacraments of the gospels suitable for teenagers and adults; well laid-out; participants book and leader's guide; 1978. Augsburg Publishing House and Fortress Press.
20. *The Sacrament of Baptism* by Daniel B. Wessler. A thirteen-minute cassette tape with a printed outline for discussion; explores the natural and biblical imagery of water as the key symbol of baptism; emphasizes baptism as commissioning; related to the reformed tradition. National Teacher Education Project, 6947 MacDonald Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85253.
21. *Thinking Baptism*. A five unit course for sixth graders; some portions, especially exercises, adaptable for other age levels; filmstrip, two small records and "Adventure Book" included. Parish Life Press.
22. *Together at Baptism*. A filmstrip describing the manner in which the baptismal celebration unfolds. Alpha Corporation of America, 1421 Armour Blvd., Mundelein, IL 60060.
23. *Touched by God's Love: The Sacrament of Baptism* by Carolyn Puccio with Ann Redpath Morse. An attractive, hardcover workbook to be used by families in preparation for a baptism and kept for re-

membrance and reflection later on in life; excellent suggestions for related exercises and crafts; Roman Catholic orientation but suitable for other traditions; 1979; about \$10.00. Winston Press, Inc., 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

24. *Water and Spirit*. A five-minute color film showing the power, beauty, and life-giving qualities of water. Teleketics: Franciscan Communications Center.
25. *We Share New Life* by Brian A. Haggerty, Thomas P. Walters, Rita Tyson Walters, and Noreen O'Brien Brohl. An extensive program of baptismal catechesis designed to help parents and godparents prepare for the baptism of a child; may be started before the child is born; includes a manual for the director of a parish program of preparation, a book for family reflections and activities, a celebrations book with little liturgies to be used by parents and godparents during preparation, and an activities booklet to help older children in the family think about their own baptism and welcome their new sibling; 1979; about \$16.00 for the set. Paulist Press.



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A. Theodore Eastman

THE BAPTIZING COMMUNITY

This book is designed to help bishops, parish clergy, and lay people to understand a new and crucial phase in the liturgical reformation of the twentieth century: the restoration of baptism to its preeminent place as the other major sacrament of the Gospels and as the sole and complete entry rite into the Body of Christ. The book provides the background needed to place the issues and problems in perspective, discusses the issues candidly, and calls on the Church to make creative and appropriate use of its new baptismal rite.

The book includes a "tour" through the baptismal service, with particular attention to the power and meaning of the great baptismal symbols, and provides concrete and practical suggestions for the preparation of adult converts and godparents.

A. Theodore Eastman is the newly consecrated Bishop Coadjutor of Maryland. During the time this book was researched and written, he was rector of St. Alban's Parish, Washington, D.C.

I am in complete agreement both with the thrust of this book and its conception of a great need which has to be met. I think it will meet that need. The style, moreover, is clear and graceful; it is a pleasure to read.

Charles P. Price

Virginia Theological Seminary

The Baptizing Community is a remarkably helpful book; it gives a pattern and a program for making baptism the principal focus for parish life.

Peter Moore

President, The Associated Parishes